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Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

No. 52 (Vol. 13, No. 4) Winter 2001- 2002

EDITOR'S DESK

Senate Bill on Belarus: All Sticks, No Carrots for Lukashenka

Senator Jesse Helms, Ranking Republican Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and its former chairman, introduced Senate Bill S.1645, "Belarus Democracy Act of 2001," in the the Senate on November 7, 2001. After two readings, the Senate referred the bill to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The bill is to be enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.

If passed, this bill will impose tough sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. It will deny international assistance to the Belarusian government, will freeze Belarusian assets in the United States, and will prohibit trade with the Lukashenka government and businesses owned by that government. It will also deny Belarusian officials the right to travel to the United States. More importantly, the bill will authorize $30 million in assistance to promote the development of democracy and civil society in Belarus.

The bill also calls on Russia to stop supporting the Lukashenka government and to respect Belarus' sovereignty. It urges the U.S. to seek the backing of European allies to apply similar sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. (See FEATURES for the full text of the bill.) It is apparent that the sanctions contained in the bill would contradict explicit recent recommendations made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) not to isolate Belarus.

In his introductory remarks, Senator Helms said that the purpose of the bill is "to support the people in Belarus . . . to revive democracy, and to reconsolidate their country's declining independence and sovereignty." He warned of the consequences resulting from Belarus losing its independece and sovereignty. He said, "Allowing Moscow to reabsorb a state that was once independent and democratic would only whet Moscow's appetite to restore the old Soviet borders. That would set a precedent that would jeopardize the security of Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Indulging antiquated Russian imperial pretensions would also undercut the prospects for democratic reform in Russia."

Initially, the Belarusian government dismissed the bill as an anti-Belarusian propaganda piece and believed that it would not be adopted by the U.S. Congress. But lately some people in the government are starting to worry that the bill might be passed.

In our opinion the bill contains a number of desirable features intended to help promote democracy in Belarus. Our only

concern is whether certain elements of the bill would work against accomplishing this objective. Would the further isolation of Belarus help? Five years of "selective isolation" (some call it "selective engagement") have failed to topple Lukashenka. In fact, with no other place to turn to, it helped him convince the people of Belarus that Russia was their only salvation. And Russia has been only too willing to help him survive by providing political and economic assistance in return for political, economic and military control of the country.

The problem is that the West has no leverage over Lukashenka. When Belarus became independent ten years ago, the West, and the U.S. in particular, cared mainly about getting nuclear weapons out of Belarus. Once that was accomplished, Belarus was abandoned and left to the "tender mercies" of Russia.

So, without any real leverage, how would the sanctions proposed in the bill make Lukashenka cry "uncle?" How would the aid reach democratic parties and NGOs in Belarus and not be blocked by Lukashenka?

As it is, Russia has all the leverage. Russia keeps subsidizing Belarus —ironically, with the help of aid it receives from the West. If Russia would stop bailing out Belarus, Lukashenka would have no choice but to seek an accomodation with the West.

Obviously, Russia is the key to resolution of the Belarus dilemma. Unfortunately, Russia is of prime concern to the security of the United States, Belarus is not. This is why Russia has been receiving a lot of U.S. attention and the lion's share of financial aid. And now the U.S. needs Russia as an ally to help fight world terrorism.

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The House has yet to develop its own version of the bill. But with so many concerns about the explosive world situation, it is not surprising that the bill is not on the top of the priority list. We hope that any ultimate bill will not only contain the positive features of the Senate bill, such as the reaffirmation of U.S. support of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus and the $30 million of assistance for promoting democracy, but will also lean more heavily on Russia to deny the last dictator of Europe the sanctuary it currently provides. We encourage our readers to write to their members of Congress, urging their Representatives to sponsor a concurrent bill in the House, and urging both the House and the Senate to pass the bill early in 2002.

We would like to mention that Senator Helms has been a great friend of the Belarusian people and *Belarusian Review*. He has been an enthusiastic supporter of development of democracy in Belarus and its democratic opposition. And he has been a staunch defender of Belarusian independence and sovereignty. His "Belarus Act of 2001" is a testimonial to this. Freedom-loving Belarusians will miss him as he retires from the Senate at the end of 2002 after the many years of dedicated service in that body.

Subscription Renewal

Now is the time to renew your subscription for the year 2002. The subscription rate remains the same as in 2001, that is $45 for individuals and $65 for institutions. For countries outside North America, an additional fee of $10 is required. Of course, your donations would be greatly appreciated. For more information on renewal, please see the bottom of the last page.

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At this time of year, we would like once again to thank our readers for their interest in our publication and their loyal support expressed in a variety of ways: verbal encouragement, subscriptions, gift subscriptions, and individual donations. Special thanks go to all of those who gave their time generously to write articles for BR, gave permission to reprint their articles free of charge, helped with editing/proofreading, and sent materials of interest to BR.

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We wish you all a happier, more peaceful and prosperous New Year!

Joe Price
Editor

FEATURES

Senate Bill S.1645
"Belarus Democracy Act of 2001"

Statement by Senator Jesse Helms

Senator Jesse Helms, Ranking Republican Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced Senate Bill S. 1645, "Belarus Democracy Act of 2001," to the Senate on November 7, 2001. Following is the text of his introductory remarks.

MR. HELMS: Mr. President, on top of the mayhem and slaughter in New York and at the Pentagon in Washington last September, a travesty against democracy occurred — again—in Belarus. Aleksandr Lukashenka, the dictator controlling this country, stole through intimidation and repression, the presidential elections that took place on September 9.

Tragic as the events in our own country were and as serious an undertaking as the war against terrorism will continue to be, we must not overlook the brutality and injustice of a regime such as the one led by Lukashenka — especially in the heart of Europe.

For this reason, I am introducing today the Belarus Democracy Act of 2001, the purpose of which is to support the people in Belarus who are struggling, often at great peril to their lives, to revive democracy, and to reconsolidate their country's declining independence and sovereignty.

Democracy has been crushed in Belarus by a fanatical dictatorship that can only be described as a brutal throwback to the Soviet era. Aleksandr Lukashenka is an authoritarian obsessed with recreating the former Soviet Union — which he believes he will ultimately lead. Because of Lukashenka, Belarus has emerged as a dark island of repression, censorship, and command economy in a region of consolidating democracies.

Belarus has tragically become the Cuba of Europe. Nonetheless, the people of Belarus have not succumbed to Lukashenka. Independent Newspapers struggle to publish. The leadership of the parliament he unconstitutionally dismissed refuses to concede legitimacy to his sham regime. Scores of non-governmental organizations fight to promote the rule of law and to protect fundamental human rights. The vibrancy of Belarus's struggling civil society has been made evident by the "Freedom Marches" that have attracted literally tens of thousands of Belarusians to the streets of Minsk and countless other anti-Lukashenka demonstrations elsewhere in Belarus.

Their agenda is the promotion of a free, independent, democratic and Western-oriented Belarus — a sharp contrast to Lukashenka's efforts to reanimate the former Soviet Union.

This is an agenda not without risk. Those who have dared to take a stand against Lukashenka have disappeared. Yuri Zakharenko disappeared soon after he resigned his post as Lukashenka's Minister of Interior and began working with the opposition. Opposition leader Victor Gonchar and his colleague, Anatoly Krasovsky, vanished just hours after Lukashenka, in a drooling rage broadcast on state television, called upon his henchmen to crackdown on the "opposition scum."

Other opposition leaders such as Andrei Klimov, have been imprisoned under harsh conditions simply for expressing their opposition to Lukashenka's regime.

This regime has tried to crush opposition marches with truncheon-wielding riot police. The independent press and non-governmental organizations promoting democracy, rule of law and human rights in Belarus are subject to constant government harassment, intimidation, arrests, fines, beatings and murder. Dmitry Zavadsky, a cameraman for Russian television, known for his critical reporting of the Lukashenka regime, disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

If passed, this bill will impose sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. It will deny international assistance to his government. It will freeze Belarusian assets in the United States. It will prohibit trade with the Lukashenka government and businesses owned by that government. It will also deny officials of the Lukashenka government the right to travel to the United States.

And, if Lukashenka continues to surrender Belarusian sovereignty, this bill will strip his government of the diplomatic properties it currently enjoys in the United States. Indeed, if he is successful in his warped effort to recreate the Soviet Union, the Government of Belarus will sadly have no need for these properties.

This bill supports our nation's vision of Europe that is democratic, free and undivided. That vision will never be fulfilled as long as Belarus suffers under the tyranny of Aleksandr Lukashenka. It is our moral and strategic interest to support those fighting for democracy and freedom in Belarus and the return of their country to the European community of free states.

To ignore this struggle for democracy and freedom and to turn an indifferent eye upon Lukashenka's effort to reconstruct the former Soviet Union would be a grave error. Not only would it be immoral, it would be strategically shortsighted.

Allowing Moscow to reabsorb a state that was once independent and democratic would only whet Moscow's appetite to restore the old Soviet borders. That would set a precedent that would only jeopardize the security of Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Indulging antiquated Russian imperial pretensions would also undercut the prospects for democratic reform in Russia.

For these reasons the Belarus Democracy Act of 2001 authorizes $30 million in assistance to restore and strengthen the institutions of democratic government in Belarus. It specifically urges the President of the United states to furnish assistance to political parties in Belarus committed to those goals. It expands the resources available to support radio broadcasting into Belarus that will facilitate the flow of uncensored information to the people of Belarus.

Mr. President, the September elections in Belarus were stained by the Lukashenka regime's cruel suppression of democratic and human rights. Let the Belarus Democracy Act be America's response to Europe's last dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenka.

Belarus Democracy Act of 2001

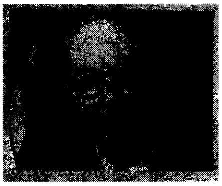
Following is the text of US Senate Bill S. 1645. If passed, the bill will provide for the promotion of democracy and rule of law in Belarus and for the protection of Belarus' sovereignty and independence. The bill was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations for further action. It is to be jointly enacted by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Belarus Democracy Act of 2001'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that--



Sen. Jesse Helms

(1) the United States has a vital interest in the consolidation and strengthening of the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus and its integration into the European community of democracies;

(2) the United States supports the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Belarus

(3) in November 1996, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka orchestrated an illegal and unconstitutional referendum that enabled him to impose upon the Belarusian people a new constitution, abolish the old parliament, the 13th Supreme Council, replace it with a rubber stamp legislature, and extend his term office to 2001;

(4) in May 1999, the Belarusian opposition challenged Lukashenka's illegal extension of his presidential term by staging alternative presidential elections and these elections were met with repression;

(5) the Belarusian opposition has organized peaceful demonstrations against the Lukashenka regime in cities and towns throughout Belarus , including the Freedom I March of October 17, 1999, the Freedom II March of March 15, 2000, and the Chernobyl Way March of April 26, 2000, each of which took place in Minsk and involved tens of thousands of Belarusians;

(6) the Lukashenka regime has responded to these peaceful marches with truncheon-swinging security personnel, mass arrests, extended incarcerations, and beatings;

(7) Andrei Klimov, a member of the last democratically elected Parliament in Belarus remains imprisoned under harsh conditions for his political opposition to Lukashenka;

(8) Victor Gonchar, Yuri Krasovsky, and Yuri Zakharenka, who have been leaders and supporters of the opposition, have disappeared under mysterious circumstances;

(9) former Belarus government officials, including four police investigators, have come forward with credible allegations and evidence that top officials of the Lukashenka regime were involved in the murders of opposition figures Yury Zakharenka, Victor Gonchar, Anatol Krasovsky, Dmitry Zavadsky, and scor es of other people;

(10) the Lukashenka regime systematically harasses and persecutes the independent media and actively suppresses freedom of speech and expression;

(11) Dmitry Zavadsky, a cameraman for Russian public television, known for his critical reporting of the Lukashenka regime, disappeared under mysterious circumstances;

(12) the Lukashenka regime harasses the autocephalic Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, evangelical churches, and other minority groups;

(13) Lukashenka advocates and actively promotes a merger between Russia and Belarus , and initiated negotiations and signed December 8, 1999, the Belarus -Russia Union Treaty even though he lacks the necessary constitutional mandate to do so;

(14) the Belarusian opposition denounces these intentions and has repeatedly called upon the international community to `unambiguously announce the nonrecognition of any international treaties concluded by Lukashenka';

(15) the United States, the European Union, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and other international bodies continue to recognize the 13th Supreme Council as the legal Belarusian Parliament;

(16) the parliamentary elections of October 15, 2000, conducted by Aleksandr Lukashenka were illegitimate and unconstitutional;

(17) these elections were plagued by violent human rights abuses committed by his regime, including the harassment, beatings, arrest, and imprisonment of members of the opposition;

(18) these elections were conducted in the absence of a democratic election law;

(19) the presidential election of September 2001 was fundamentally unfair and featured significant and abusive misconduct by the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka, including--

(A) the harassment, arrest, and imprisonment of opposition leaders;

(B) the denial of opposition candidates equal and fair access to the dominant state-controlled media;

(C) the seizure of equipment and property of independent nongovernmental organizations and press organizations and the harassment of their staff and management;

(D) voting and vote counting procedures that were not transparent; and

(E) a campaign of intimidation directed against opposition activists, domestic election observation organizations, opposition and independent media, and a libelous media campaign against international observers; and

(20) the last parliamentary election in Belarus deemed to be free and fair by the international community took place in 1995 and from it emerged the 13th Supreme Soviet whose democratically and constitutionally derived authorities and powers have been usurped by the authoritarian regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka.

SEC. 3. ASSISTANCE TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN BELARUS .

(a) PURPOSES OF ASSISTANCE- The assistance under this section shall be available for the following purposes:

(1) To assist the people of Belarus in regaining their freedom and to enable them to join the international community of democracies.

(2) To restore and strengthen institutions of democratic government in Belarus .

(3) To encourage free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus , conducted in a manner consistent with internationally accepted standards and under the supervision of internationally recognized observers.

(4) To sustain and strengthen international sanctions against the Lukashenka regime in Belarus .

(b) AUTHORIZATION FOR ASSISTANCE- To carry out the purposes of subsection (a), the President is authorized to furnish assistance and other support for the activities described in subsection (c) and primarily for indigenous Belarusian political parties and nongovernmental organizations.

(c) ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED- Activities that may be supported by assistance under subsection (b) include--

(1) democratic forces, including political parties, committed

to promoting democracy and Belarus' independence and sovereignty;

(2) democracy building;

(3) radio and television broadcasting to Belarus ;

(4) the development and support of nongovernmental organizations promoting democracy and supporting human rights both in Belarus and in exile;

(5) the development of independent media working within Belarus and from locations outside of Belarus and supported by nonstate-controlled printing facilities;

(6) international exchanges and advanced professional training programs for leaders and members of the democratic forces in skill areas central to the development of civil society; and

(7) the development of all elements of democratic processes, including political parties and the ability to conduct free and fair elections.

(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS-

(1) IN GENERAL- There is authorized to be appropriated to the President $30,000,000 for the fiscal year 2002.

(2) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS- Amounts appropriated pursuant to paragraph (1) are authorized to remain available until expended.

SEC. 4. AUTHORIZED FUNDING FOR RADIO BROADCASTING IN AND INTO BELARUS.

(a) IN GENERAL- The purpose of this section is to augment support for independent and uncensored radio broadcasting in and into Belarus that will facilitate the dissemination of information in a way that is not impeded by the government of Lukashenka.

(b) ALLOCATION OF FUNDS- Not less than $5,000,000 made available under section 3 shall be available only for programs that facilitate and support independent broadcasting into and in Belarus on AM and FM bandwidths, including programming from the Voice of America and RFE/RL, Incorporated.

(c) REPORTING ON RADIO BROADCASTING TO AND IN BELARUS - Not later than 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall submit to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives a report on how funds allocated under subsection (b) will be used to provide AM and FM broadcasting that covers the territory of Belarus and delivers to the people of Belarus programming free from censorship of the government of Lukashenka.

SEC. 5. SANCTIONS AGAINST THE LUKASHENKA REGIME.

(a) APPLICATIONS OF MEASURES- The sanctions described in this section and sections 6, 8, and 9, shall apply with respect to Belarus until the President determines and certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that the Government of Belarus has made significant progress in meeting the conditions described in subsection (b).

(b) CONDITIONS- The conditions referred to in subsection (a) are the following:

(1) The release of all those individuals who have been jailed for their political views.

(2) The withdrawal of politically motivated legal charges against all opposition figures.

(3) The provision of a full accounting of those opposition leaders and journalists, including Victor Gonchar, Yuri Krasovsky, Yuri Zakharenka, and Dmitry Zavadsky, who have disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and the prosecution of those individuals who are responsible for those disappearances.

(4) The cessation of all forms of harassment and repression against the independent media, nongovernmental organizations, and the political opposition.

(5) The implementation of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections.

(c) INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS- The Secretary of the Treasury shall instruct the United States executive directors of the international financial institutions to oppose, and vote against, any extension by those institutions of any financial assistance (including any technical assistance or grant) of any kind to the Government of Belarus , except for loans and assistance that serve basic human needs.

(d) INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS DEFINED- In this section, the term international financial institution includes the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the Multilateral Investment Guaranty Agency, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

SEC. 6. BLOCKING BELARUSIAN ASSETS IN THE UNITED STATES.

(a) BLOCKING OF ASSETS- All property and interests in property, including all commercial, industrial, or public utility undertakings or entities, that are owned in whole or in part by the Government of Belarus , or by any member of the senior leadership of Belarus , that are in the United States, that hereafter come within the United States, or that are or hereafter come within the possession or control of United States persons, including their overseas branches, are hereby blocked.

(b) EXERCISE OF AUTHORITIES- The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall take such actions, including the promulgation of regulations, orders, directives, rulings, instructions, and licenses, and employ all powers granted to the President by the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, as may be necessary to carry out subsection (a).

(c) PROHIBITED TRANSFERS- Transfers prohibited under subsection (b) include payments or transfers of any property or any transactions involving the transfer of anything of economic value by any United States person to the Government of Belarus , or any person or entity acting for or on behalf of, or owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by that government, or to any member of the senior leadership of Belarus .

(d) PAYMENT OF EXPENSES- All expenses incident to the blocking and maintenance of property blocked under subsection (a) shall be charged to the owners or operators of such property, which expenses shall not be met from blocked funds.

(e) PROHIBITIONS- The following shall be prohibited as of the date of enactment of this Act:

(1) The exportation to any entity owned, controlled, or operated by the Government of Belarus , directly or indirectly, of any goods, technology, or services, either--

(A) from the United States;

(B) requiring the issuance of a license for export by a Federal agency; or

(C) involving the use of United States registered vessels or aircraft, or any activity that promotes or is intended to promote such exportation.

(2) The performance by any United States person of any con-

tract, including a financing contract, in support of an industrial, commercial, or public utility operated, controlled, or owned by the Government of Belarus .

(f) EXCEPTIONS- Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, this section does not apply to--

(1) assistance provided under section 3 or 4 of this Act;

(2) those materials described in section 203(b)(3) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act relating to informational materials; or

(3) materials being sent to Belarus as relief in response to a humanitarian crisis.

(g) STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION- Nothing in this Act prohibits any contract or other financial transaction with any private or nongovernmental organization or business in Belarus .

SEC. 7. DENYING ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES TO BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS.

It is the sense of Congress that the President should use his authority under section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(f)) to suspend the entry into the United States of any alien who--

(1) holds a position in the senior leadership of the Government of Belarus ; or

(2) is a spouse, minor child, or agent of a person inadmissible under paragraph (1).

SEC. 8. PROHIBITION ON STRATEGIC EXPORTS TO BELARUS .

No computers, computer software, goods intended to manufacture or service computers, no technology intended to manufacture or service computers, or any other goods or technology may be exported to or for use by the Government of Belarus , or by any of the following entities of that government:

(1) The military.

(2) The police.

(3) The prison system.

(4) The national security agencies.

SEC. 9. PROHIBITION ON LOANS AND INVESTMENT.

(a) UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FINANCING- No loan, credit guarantee, insurance, financing, or other similar financial assistance may be extended by any agency of the United States Government (including the Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation) to the Government of Belarus .

(b) TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY- No funds made available by law may be available for activities of the Trade and Development Agency in or for Belarus .

(c) THIRD COUNTRY ACTION- Congress urges the Secretary of State to encourage all other countries, particularly European countries, to suspend any of their own programs providing support similar to that described in subsection (a) or (b) to the Government of Belarus , including the rescheduling of repayment of the indebtedness of that government under more favorable conditions.

(d) PROHIBITION ON PRIVATE CREDITS- No United States person may make or approve any loan or other extension of credit, directly or indirectly, to the Government of Belarus or to any corporation, partnership, or other organization that is owned, operated, or controlled by the Government of Belarus .

SEC. 10. DENIAL OF GSP.

(a) FINDING- Congress finds that the Government of Belarus has failed to respect internationally recognized worker rights.

(b) DENIAL OF GSP BENEFITS- Congress approves the decision of the United States Government to deny tariff treatment under title V of the Trade Act of 1974 (the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)) to Belarus .

SEC. 11. MULTILATERAL SANCTIONS.

It is the sense of Congress that the President should continue to seek to coordinate with other countries, particularly European countries, a comprehensive, multilateral strategy to further the purposes of this Act, including, as appropriate, encouraging other countries to take measures similar to those described in this Act.

SEC. 12. OWNERSHIP AND USE OF DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR PROPERTIES.

It is the sense of Congress that, if an undemocratic and illegitimate Government of Belarus , enters into a union with the Russian Federation that results in the loss of sovereignty for Belarus , the United States should immediately withdraw any and all privileges and immunities under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations enjoyed by the personnel and property of the Government of Belarus and demand the immediate departure of such personnel from the United States.

SEC. 13. REPORTS.

(a) IN GENERAL- Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, and every year thereafter, the President shall submit a report to the appropriate congressional committees reporting on--

(1) assistance and commerce received by Belarus from other foreign countries during the previous 12-month period;

(2) the sales of weapons and weapons-related technologies from Belarus during that 12-month period;

(3) the relationship between the Lukashenka regime and the Government of the Russian Federation; and

(4) the personal assets and wealth of Aleksandr Lukashenka and other senior leaders of the Government of Belarus .

(b) REPORT ELEMENTS- Each report required by subsection (a) shall, for the period covered by the report, contain, to the extent such information is known--

(1) a description of all assistance, including humanitarian assistance, provided to the Government of Belarus by foreign governments and multilateral institutions;

(2) a description of Belarus' commerce with foreign countries, including the identification of Belarus' chief trading partners and the extent of such trade;

(3) a description of joint ventures completed, or under construction by foreign nationals involving facilities in Belarus ; and

(4) an identification of the countries that purchase or have purchased, arms or military supplies from Belarus or that have come into agreements with the Belarus Government that have a military application, including--

(A) a description of the military supplies, equipment, or other material sold, bartered, or exchanged between Belarus and such countries; and

(B) a listing of the goods, services, credits, or other consideration recieved by the Belarus government in exchange for military supplies, equipment, or material.

SEC. 14. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

Congress hereby--

(1) expresses its support to those in Belarus seeking--

(A) to promote democracy and the rule of law, to consolidate the independence and sovereignty of Belarus; and

(B) to promote its integration into the European community of democracies;

(2) expresses its grave concern about the disappearances of Victor Gonchar, Yuri Krasovsky, Yuri Zakharenka, Dmitry Zavadsky, and other members of the opposition and press;

(3) calls upon Lukashenka's regime to cease its persecution of political opponents and to release those, including Andrei Klimov, who have been imprisoned for opposing his regime;

(4) calls upon the Lukashenka regime to respect the basic freedoms of speech, expression, assembly, association, language, and religion;

(5) calls upon Lukashenka to allow parliamentary and presidential elections to be conducted that are free, fair, and fully meet international standards;

(6) calls upon the Government of Russia, the State Duma, and the Federation Council to end its support, including financial support, to the Lukashenka regime and to fully respect the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Belarus;

(7) calls upon the Government of Belarus to resolve the continuing constitutional and political crisis through free, fair, and transparent elections, including, as called for by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), of which Belarus is a member--

(A) respect for human rights;

(B) an end to the current climate of fear;

(C) opposition and meaningful access to state media;

(D) modification of the electoral code to make the code more democratic;

(E) engaging in genuine talks with the opposition; and

(F) permitting real power for the parliament.

(8) calls upon other governments to refuse to use as diplomatic residences or for any other purpose properties seized by the Lukashenka regime from the Belarusian political opposition;

(9) calls upon the international community, including the Government of Russia, to refuse to ratify or accept any treaty signed by Aleksandr Lukashenka or any other official of his government; and

(10) commends the democratic opposition in Belarus for their commitment to freedom, their courage in the face of Lukashenka's brutal repression, and the unity and cooperation their various political parties and nongovernmental organizations demonstrated during the October 2000 parliamentary elections and the October 2001 presidential elections and calls upon the democratic opposition of Belarus to sustain that unity and cooperation as part of the effort to bring an end to Lukashenka's dictatorship.

SEC. 15. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) SENIOR LEADERSHIP OF BELARUS- The term `senior leadership of Belarus' includes--

(A) the President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, government ministers, and deputy ministers of Belarus;

(B) the Governor of the National Bank of Belarus;

(C) officials of the Belarus Committee for State Affairs (BKGB), the police, and any other organ of repression;

(D) any official of the Government of Belarus involved in the suppression of freedom in Belarus, including judges and prosecutors;

(E) any official of the Government of Belarus directly appointed by Aleksandr Lukashenka; and

(F) officials of the presidential administration.

(2) UNITED STATES- The term `United States' means the States of the United States, the District of Columbia, and any commonwealth, territory, dependency, or possession of the United States.

(3) UNITED STATES PERSON- The term `United States person' means any United States resident or national (other than an individual resident outside the United States and employed by other than a United States person), any domestic concern (including any permanent domestic establishment of any foreign concern) and any foreign subsidiary or affiliate (including any permanent foreign establishment) of any domestic concern which is controlled in fact by such domestic concern, as determined under regulations of the President.

Belarus After the Elections: Results, Legitimacy, Observation

Following is the text of the speech Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck made at the Minsk forum on November 23, 2001. Ambassador Wieck left Belarus by the end of 2001 after serving as Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus for four years. He stated that the decision not to stay in Belarus for a second term was his personal choice.

Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck Head of the Advisory and Monitoring Group November 23, 2001

I. OSCE Activities in Support of Free and Fair Elections

1. During the four years of my activities with the AMG in Belarus we concentrated on

— Advice to the official institutions regarding the Electoral Code and framework conditions, among others regarding the withdrawal of state structures from election commissions and the re-enforcement of the participation in the election commissions of representatives of candidates as well as of all social groups, participating political parties and organizations, as well as regarding the transparency of the counting and aggregation process.

— Advice to the authorities regarding permanent access of political parties, notably the opposition, to the state-controlled mass media and advice regarding the establishment of competitive conditions for state and independent print media.

— Advice regarding expansion of meaningful functions of the Parliament.

— Advice regarding the discontinuation of political opponents by way of administrative or criminal court proceedings and the renunciation of exercise of social pressure on opponents (expulsion from university, dismissal from jobs).

— Advice to political parties and to NGOs on matters related to elections and domestic observation, which are a right and a task of civil society.

2. On all three occasions (local, parliamentary and presidential elections) the European Institutions that have been following the election process concluded that the elections failed to meet OSCE standards. The same conclusions were reached by independent NGOs involved in domestic observation. I don't have to go into details. The Parliamentary Troika/ODIHR Report dated October 4, 2001 is available here in Russian and in English, and so is the report by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

3. It is noteworthy that a critical position was also in the report by the long-term observation mission of the Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials. Nevertheless, in all fairness I state that the CIS delegation and those from CIS countries, as well as individual political travelers from Europe and overseas, were mostly positive. However, these groups were only short-term observers. Given the refinement achieved in the conduct of elections under strict state control, the manipulation acts are no longer very visible for the short-term observer — with one exception, from the distance at which in almost all polling stations the observers were kept away from the tables where the counting process took place.

II. Where to Go from Here?

1. The elections took place: there is an acting President, as there is an acting Parliament. Nonetheless, the European Institutions did not recognize these elections as meeting OSCE standards.

2. The European Institutions noted, however, the emergence of a more strident civil society — not due to the efforts of the Government, but rather in spite of the government's attitude — and stated that isolation is not conducive to democratic developments. That is also correct.

But how can one bridge the democratic deficit in the election process and achieve the goal of improving the status of Belarus in the European Institutions?

The step-by-step approach may offer a way out. In order to improve the framework conditions for the elections to come and for the democratic transformation process to advance, the Government needs to make changes in the key areas of contention:

— The Electoral Code and other framework conditions for the elections to come have to be improved;

— There have to be meaningful functions of the Parliament;

—There has to be a different media situation in the country;

—There has to be an end to the policy of intimidation of opposition and their supporters.

I am aware of the fact that the President and his Government are of the they have delivered the package, and that now there is a thriving democracy in the country. This position also emerged in the media after the review of the foreign policy issues that took place recently under the chairmanship of the President. According to Mr. Matusevich, the Director of the institute of Social and Political Studies under the Presidential Administration, the September elections have changed the situation in the country, and that is why a change was possible in relations between the authorities and the opposition. He also stated that there were good preconditions for a broad dialogue with the West. Belarus is ready to engage in all possible consultations, talks and dialogues, but only on condition we are treated on a footing of equality. This approach needs to be explored, of course. It holds a promise of change on condition that the status of Belarus in the European Institutions is restored without any further "concessions" on the part of Belarus.

The European institutions do not share this opinion. According to my assessment, they are not in a position to give credit for something that did not occur, namely the elections according to OSCE standards.

Such steps, as expected to come from the official side and which I addressed in general terms in this paper, will in their turn bring about changes in the relations of the European Institutions with Belarus.

3. The Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe-after all, the guardian of the democratic values system in Europe — met in Vilnius on November 19/20, 2001 and decided to dispatch a delegation for talks with Government, opposition and NGOs. It will be a fact-finding mission, but also a mission to encourage meaningful dialogue with the European Institutions and between the opposing forces in the country. The visiting delegation will also prepare a report for the CoE PA Session on January 21, 2002.

4. Also, the chairperson of the Belarus ad hoc Working Group of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, MS. Uta Zapf (Germany), accompanied by Mr. Urban Ahlin (Sweden), will have talks in Minsk in order to prepare a report for the PA OSCE Standing Committee on the same issues. The Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Assembly will have their winter session in Vienna in February 2002.

5. The European Union is also in the process of reviewing the situation. There are representatives of European Union countries in the room to speak about that.

6. Nowadays there is a talk about reform policies. Hopefully this time. Unfortunately, at the moment, we witness a period of prosecution of individuals and bodies involved in the presidential elections in support of the opposing candidate. The Grodno Newspaper "Pagonya" was closed by court decision; the Belarusian Association of Students faces a trial and suspension of its registration; youth organizations are prevented from registering regional and local offices. Mr. Kalugin — a potential-candidate in the past presidential elections — and director of the Minsk Refrigerator Factory was arrested.

7. On the other hand, the European Institutions and the many non-governmental organizations interested in supporting the respect for Human Rights and the development of a strident civil society have to be aware of the fact that such a development of civil society does not correspond to the civil society model aimed at by the authorities. The clash of these concepts is visible on a daily basis.

While in other parts of Europe you discuss a "Freedom of Speech and Information" legislation, here you discuss a legislative draft for "Information Security," which, if adopted, would solidify the control of state institutions over any information related to their activities. The amendments to the media law are also under way, and the AMG plans to hold a conference — together with the Representative of the OSCE for the Freedom of the Media — on this bill early next year.

8. In this connection, I would like to touch on another issue. The Government of Belarus considers the Head of the AMG to be the mastermind of the opposition. They are wrong. The AMG renders advice to the Government, Opposition and NGOs. The AMG continues to operate joint projects with the government in a number of fields.

However, after the 2000 parliamentary elections the Government rejected any further talks on democratic reforms (Electoral Code and related framework conditions of elections). On the contrary, it complicated — by way of presidential decrees — the framework conditions for the elections and the challengers of the incumbent. Subsequently, the Government broke off dialog on the essential points of our relationship.

The Head of the mission enjoyed and continues to enjoy the support of the Chairman-in-Office for its activities according to OSCE standards : see the mandate and the Istanbul Declaration of the OSCE Heads of state and Government dated November 18, 1999.

It is true, however, that last summer I informed the Chairman-in-Office and the German Government that I would not wish to extend my work beyond a period of four years, which means beyond the end of this year. To continue working here would mean a full engagement for the next several, if not five, years in order to effectively follow the elections process of the years to come.

Also, it is diplomatic practice not to stay much longer than three to four years at one post.

III. Conclusions

1. The elections were not democratic according to OSCE standards. Endeavors to bring about improvements for future elections have to continue.

Under these circumstances a relaxation of the tensions existing between the European Institutions and Belarus will depend on steps taken by the authorities in the four fields of contention. The commitment of the European Institutions is toward the development of democratic institutions in the country. The Government and civil society have a great responsibility in this regard. Dialogue, as well as genuinely free and fair elections are the means through which the development of a European mainstream democratic Belarus can be achieved.

2. The credibility of the political opposition will largely depend on its capacity to constitute itself as a cohesive alliance of political forces and social movements to deal with critical issues, without suspending the independence of its components.

3. The preparation for the elections in the years to come will have to start now. That includes reforms in the network of independent domestic election observation. It is obvious that organizations and local self-administration to strengthen its activities.

The EU and the ODIHR are in the process of finalizing their decisions on projects to be implemented by the AMG in 2002/2003. At present the EU/OSCE projects for 2000/2001 are in their final phase. One project, "Youth and Democracy," which constituted the concretized scheme for the broad concept of a "Lecture Series", could not be initiated because of a reluctance of the authorities to engage in this field in the year 2001.

Concern has to be expressed about the hardening of the administration's position towards the opponents and their supporters during the presidential elections. This is of great concern to us because such repressive measures indicate the continued prevalence of a friend-foe relationship with the political opponents and not that of a fair competition among equals for the support of the electorate.

Minsk, November 22, 2001

Source: Charter 97, November 2001

U.S.-Belarusian Relations: The Myths and the Realities

Delivered by U.S. Ambassador Michael Kozak at the Minsk Forum, Nov. 24, 2001

Thank you, especially for all of your hard work in organizing the Minsk Forum.

Last June in Warsaw, President Bush affirmed the framework of U.S. policy regarding Central and Eastern Europe. He said, "our goal is to erase the false lines that have divided Europe for too long. The future of every European nation must be determined by the progress of internal reform, not the interests of outside powers. Every European nation that struggles toward democracy and free markets and a strong civic culture must be welcomed into Europe's home."

This vision for the future of Belarus is not something new. When President Clinton visited Minsk in January 1994, he set a similar goal in a speech to the Academy of Sciences.

So the reality is a clear, consistent desire of the United States to see Belarus become a part of a prosperous and integrated Europe. Nevertheless, a number of myths about U.S. policy toward Belarus have emerged.

MYTH NUMBER ONE: THE U.S. SEEKS TO ISOLATE BELARUS

I have had diplomats and journalists tell me with great conviction that the U.S. refuses to speak to any Belarusian officials and only provides assistance to opposition politicians. This is simply not true.

What is the case is that in February 1997, the United States adopted a policy called "selective engagement." This was similar to the policy adopted by the European Union. It sought to manifest our concern over the moves taken against the Belarusian Parliament and the Judiciary by restricting the participation of United States cabinet-level officials in routine bilateral meetings with Belarusian Executive Branch officials. But that did not mean that we ended all contact with Belarusian officials, let alone attempt to isolate the country. As my boss told me, "selective engagement" means we select when it is useful to engage to advance our agenda.

U.S. officials at the sub-cabinet level have continued to have contacts with Belarusian authorities. For example, our Assistant Secretary level officials have met on numerous occasions with Belarusian Ministers as well as with other Belarusian officials over the past four years. And we have an active dialogue here in Minsk. This year, a number of high-ranking Americans, including Deputy Assistant Secretary Purnell, Congressman Peter Deutsch and NATO /EUCOM Commander General Joseph Ralston visited Belarus and met with senior Belarusian officials including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defense, and senior officials of the Presidential Administration.

Engagement with a country clearly is not limited to talk with its government. It includes a spectrum of concrete activities including, in the case of developing countries, an assistance relationship. The EU and the US each decided to limit direct assistance to the Belarusian authorities as a consequence of Belarusian government actions. But that did not mean we cut off assistance to the country. Indeed, since 1992, the U.S. has never broken its engagement with the citizens of Belarus. U.S. assistance levels to Belarus have actually grown in recent years. Since 1992, the U.S. has provided almost $600 million in assistance to Belarus including $190 million in U.S. Department of Defense and privately-donated humanitarian commodities-mostly medicines. Last year, our Government provided over $36 million in assistance including over $23 million in humanitarian assistance. In fact, the single largest increase in our assistance budget last year was in the area of humanitarian assistance. Most of this is medicine that is used in government hospitals and clinics. General Ralston visited to inaugurate a blood transfusion clinic that our military had renovated in Gomel, and our military is engaged in similar humanitarian activity in Belarus as we speak.

We also have a very active program of assistance to academic institutions in Belarus, most of them state run. Exchange programs are the second largest component of our assistance budget after humanitarian aid. This past year alone, I have had the pleasure this year of participating in the graduation ceremonies of the Minsk State Linguistic University and the Belarusian State University's graduate program in business. I attended a class at the Belarusian State University of Culture class being conducted by an American exchange professor. I gave an interview to the Belarusian State University radio station on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of that institution. I attended a meeting in which Belarusian alumni of exchange programs with the United States decided to form an association. I was impressed not only by the

number of persons who have participated in exchanges - over 2000 since 1991and over 250 in the past year alone - but by the number of educators from State Institutions who have done so.

We have arranged for both active-duty military officers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, and individuals from civil society and the political opposition to attend advanced national security classes at the Marshall Center in Germany. This year, the head of the Marshall Center, Dr. Kennedy, attended the alumni dinner my Military Attache arranged in Minsk. Over 80 Belarusian military officers attended. We have funded Internet access sites in both government and non-government sites throughout the country. We have funded cross border trips for journalists working for State-run media as well as their colleagues in the independent media. A group of 7 journalists visited NATO headquarters in Brussels earlier this year under one of our programs.

Our assistance to civil society is also well established. The biggest component lies in the media area. The U.S. Agency for International Development funds a program by IREX Promedia to provide technical assistance to professionalize independent media. The vast majority of our Embassy small grants program is largely directed at funding newsprint and equipment purchases for independent media. We also fund subscriptions so that independent press is available in libraries, factories and other public places. We have also funded a wide variety of social activities by NGOs dealing with everything from the problems of single mothers to legal defense services. We have consistently provided training in democratic processes on a non-partisan basis through our party institutes, NDI and IRI. This year, we helped a range of NGOs across the political spectrum with get out the vote and voter education projects. Through NDI we cooperated with the OSCE mission in providing assistance in the development of an independent voting observation network of NGOs. We have not, do not, and will not fund any political parties or partisan political activity.

So the reality is that far from seeking to isolate Belarus, the United States is heavily engaged in Belarus. Our engagement is purposeful. First, we encourage the government to engage in the reforms needed to bring it into compliance with the international democratic standards Belarus itself accepted when it joined the OSCE and other international institutions. Second, we support the development of civil society regardless of the obstacles. To us, this is the only way of achieving the goals of a truly independent, democratic and prosperous Belarus that President Bush outlined.

MYTH NUMBER TWO: THE U.S. HAS IMPOSED AN ECONOMIC EMBARGO AGAINST BELARUS

In fact, U.S. companies are free to trade with Belarus as with any other country. Belarus' problems in the economic area are the consequence of the direct effects of its own policies of abandoning market reforms, and its own choices in failing to meet generally applicable international criteria.

Belarus got into difficulties with the International Financial Institutions when it deviated from the criteria those institutions apply to every country.

Similarly, some U.S. programs have been affected not because of political criteria, but because of Belarus' failure to meet generally applicable economic criteria. For example, our investment insurance agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, suspended its program of insurance and financing because the Government of Belarus failed to resolve a significant financial claim.

The International Labor Organization found repeated violations of workers' rights by the Government of Belarus. Pursuant to a law applicable to all countries that fail to meet international labor standards, the U.S. suspended the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Belarus. U.S. and other international companies are reluctant to invest in Belarus because of non-transparency of Belarusian government policy and lack of structural market reforms. We know for example that the Ford Motor Company closed its assembly plant in Belarus last year. The British company that took over the plant closed its own operations this year. In both cases, unpredictable government policy was cited as a major factor.

Far from having an economic embargo, we have been told by the Belarussian Government that the United States is the single largest investor in Belarus. Yet, this is not a source of satisfaction. American investment in all neighboring countries is far larger.

So, the myth of a U.S. embargo is a distraction. The reality is that Belarus' negative economic outlook is a consequence of its failure to maintain policies that meet international economic standards. The solution too is clear. The United States supports the efforts by the IMF and others to encourage the authorities to get back on the reform track.

MYTH NUMBER THREE: THE U.S. POLICY IN BELARUS IS DRIVEN BY PERSONALITY DISPUTES OR A COLD WAR MENTALITY

Our interest is in seeing Belarus' political and economic systems come into compliance with European standards. In our view this is the best guarantee of stability in Europe. A change in personalities without a change in the system would not serve our interests nor bring Belarus out of its predicament.

As Secretary Powell stated in his message on the 10th Anniversary of Belarus' Independence, "The United States is prepared to resume productive bilateral relations; to restart high-level contacts; and to encourage greater two-way political, trade, investment, and military contacts. However, we are prepared to do so only if Belarusian authorities adhere to standards Belarus accepted as an OSCE participating state and a UN member state. Among others these standards include free, fair and democratic electoral processes; respect for civil society and human rights; and rule of law."

Last July, when NATO Commander General Joseph Ralston visited Gomel, I said publicly: "The U.S. is prepared to normalize relations with Belarus if the Belarusian authorities meet the standards to which Belarus has committed itself in the OSCE framework. This means that the U.S. would be prepared to accept the results of a presidential election process carried out--from today--in accord with these standards regardless of who might win the election. The Government of Belarus knows in very specific terms the steps that it needs to take to achieve recognition of its elections as free, fair, and transparent. It also knows precisely what the U.S. and other nations are prepared to do to improve relations if Belarus adheres to all of its OSCE commitments.

Please note that each of these statements, and similar ones from Congressman Peter Deutch and Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones, were made before the September elections. The import of each is that we were not interested in who won, but how they won.

This was not mere rhetoric. In coordination with the OSCE we had engaged in an intensive dialogue with the Belarusian authorities last Spring. With the authorities, we put together a sequence of concrete steps by each side that would have led to normalization of relations before the elections in the context of minimal compliance with OSCE standards for the elections. This exercise was done on an ad referendum basis. In the end, the highest levels on the Belarusian side determined not to approve going forward to carry out the program of reciprocal steps. I mention it to illustrate two points: First, that the United States is interested in seeing an open political process in this country, not in achieving a particular result from that process. Second, that it is possible to work out with Belarusian authorities a specific set of reciprocal steps to get us from where we are to where we want to be. What is needed is the political will to march down that path.

CONCLUSIONS:

Belarus has had two excellent opportunities within the past year to demonstrate its desire to fulfill its commitment to reach OSCE standards --the October 15, 2000 Parliamentary election and the September 9, 2001 presidential elections. Unfortunately, in both cases the OSCE/ODIHR determined that the elections process failed to meet applicable international standards for democratic elections.

I would note too that the effort of some to cast the problem in a Cold War, Russia versus the West, context is another part of the myth. As best I can tell, the Russian Federation has been encouraging economic reforms similar to those recommended by the International Monetary Fund. Similarly, the ODIHR mission had many elections experts from former Soviet countries, and the Chairman of the Central Elections Commission of the Russian Federation has called publicly for electoral reform in Belarus in much the same terms as the ODHIR. So Belarus is not torn between East and West. Each is giving them the same advice on key issues.

So what is the future of U.S.-Belarusian relations? Despite the flawed elections, President Bush stated on September 17 that "he believes that Belarus and its people can and should be a part of a Europe whole, free, and at peace."

As we have consistently stated, the U.S. will continue to engage with the Belarusian people regardless of the relationship between the two governments. We will coordinate very closely with the OSCE and our European allies to determine how we will work with the current Belarusian authorities.

In our view, our common approach should be based on some clear principles:

As President Bush has said, we accept the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission report. Accordingly, we adhere to its conclusions that (a) the elections did not meet democratic standards, (b) a vibrant civil society has emerged despite the efforts of the authorities, and should be supported, and (c) that the isolation of Belarus would not be in the interest of the Belarusian people As I have attempted to demonstrate, we believe that our policy has reflected each of these principles.

We owe it to the Belarusian authorities and people to be as clear and concrete as possible as to what we seek: A legal environment in which peaceful political opposition and civil society can operate as they would in other European countries - without fear, An environment in which all points of view can be expressed in the media, whether state owned or independent, without censorship or fear of retribution. An electoral process that is open and transparent. And finally, the return of independent legislative and judicial functions to those branches of government.

In each of these areas, we need to be able to discuss concrete steps towards these goals and what the Belarusian side can expect in return if it takes those steps. Whether these steps are taken in large packages or smaller increments is less important than that they be taken. And we must not mislead the Belarusian side into believing that words and gestures will be enough. The problem is not one of rhetoric, and neither is the solution.

In the end, it is up to the Belarusians themselves to determine whether they will move down the path to compliance with the same criteria that apply in the rest of Europe, or whether they will continue to isolate themselves from the progress and prosperity that is flourishing around them. We are confident that if we continue to work with all aspects of Belarusian society, they will make the right choice.

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

Belarus Elections and After

By Mikalaj Packajeu

Editor's Note: *Due to time constraint it was not possible to fit Mr. Packajeu's original article in the autumn issue of BELARUSIAN REVIEW. Even though events described in the body of his article have also been covered by other authors, Mr. Packajeu's reflections in the introductory and concluding sections of the article are interesting and continue to be relevant to the period AFTER the election.*

Introduction

The recent presidential campaign in Belarus was meant to be the culmination of the Belarusian democratic opposition's campaign to terminate Lukashenka's dictatorship. This was to be achieved by means of democratic electoral procedures and within the framework of law as defined by the regime itself. One might say this campaign in had its roots in the parliamentary elections of October 2000, when democratic opposition declared a boycott of the heavily controlled and manipulated elections set up by Lukashenka to replace the democratically-elected parliament in December 1996. The boycott was meant to put internal and international pressure on Lukashenka, so that if he wanted the presidential elections of 2001 recognized as legitimate, he would have to recognize democratic principles. The fact that opposition nominees for the presidency were at least allowed to register as candidates, may have been a result of the earlier boycott.

So what went wrong?

The conduct of the election has been condemned as undemocratic, not only by the opposition but by international observers and human rights organizations. The opposition had to contend with severe restrictions on campaigning arrests and threats of arrests. There was censoring and total confiscations of independent papers, and presses printing the opposition's publicity materials were stopped. Hancaryk was prohibited from meeting with the voters in some locations. In the state-monopoly electronic media and national papers there was heavy and unchallenged indoctrination on behalf of Lukashenka, (as well as smearing the opposition) while in the final weeks before the election, most Russian TV

transmissions received in Belarus also suspended their occasional criticisms of Lukashenka. Numerous violations of voting procedures were also reported, including ballot boxes with removable sides. So Lukashenka's landslide win (results which are in contradiction to the opinion polls) left little doubt among most internal and international observers that the figures reflect both the regime's oppressive nature - and perhaps, since Lukashenka only claimed a mere 75 % of the votes cast - a certain degree of personal calculated modesty.

Official distortion of the results had, of course, been expected. The coalition, however, had counted on the influence of the disenchanted among the ruling nomenklatura, who, on account of their ties with Hancaryk (and in western Belarus with Domas) would take steps to ensure a fair count. But this influence turned out to have been greatly overestimated.

Exaggerated too was the presumed power of corporate interests amongst the nomenklatura. However annoyed they may feel at the president's excesses, his 'vertical' system of administration has made them so dependent on his grace - and so intimidated by the fate of those who have fallen out of favour - that this sector had to yield to the instincts for personal survival. This was true not only among the state apparatus : some of the middle-rank provincial leaders of Hancaryk's own trade unions campaigned on behalf of Lukashenka.

Finally, the opposition was unable to implement its plans to force Lukashenka to admit his true voter's approval, estimated at less than 50% , which would have meant the election going to a second round. Additionally, the national strike and the street protests urged by some opposition figures failed to materialize. Meanwhile any strategy of defeating the dictator by means of elections should have first, as its sine qua non, ensured that it was able (and indeed was believed to be able) to see to it that the actual will of the people was indeed implemented. It is axiomatic that there is no point in calling on the electorate to vote the dictator out of office if the dictator is able to get away with 'fixing' the results of the poll.

The strategy (or gamble) of unifying behind a single democratic candidate, clearly failed - in spite of hard work put in by thousands at the grass roots level. Having a candidate whose political views and background were often far from their own, and the leaders unprecedented willingness to shelve their differences in the name of a common goal is not enough. Clearly, Lukashenka is not willing to let himself be voted out of office.

So what now?

The Western community appears to be hesitant as to how to react. On the one hand, the US has strongly condemned as illegitimate Lukashenka's re-election - but has not translated that condemnation into any practical response such as sanctions. However, over the past few years there have been so many such 'condemnations' that Lukashenka and his entourage have doubtless built-up an immunity to them.

On the other hand, some voices in the West (especially in Europe) have begun to criticise the ineffectiveness of the Western policy of isolating Belarus. They suggest instead more intensive contacts with its representatives - apparently hoping that the members and employees of Lukashenka's administration will thus witness and become convinced of the benefits of democracy, and then spread the message. Lukashenka's regime, however, would simply take any such moves as proof that its unwillingness to compromise was paying dividends - and would shape its future actions accordingly. Furthermore, even if some envoy of Lukashenka were to become convinced of the superior merits of democracy, a single convert cannot have much of an impact under the prevailing autocratic system of decision-making. Such a 'malcontent' would simply be purged from the government.

Meanwhile, other options such as of economic sanctions were neither put on the agenda nor seriously debated by the West. Some observers still believe that such sanctions - if carefully devised - could in fact be targeted specifically at the business sectors that are most closely connected with administration, and command some attention. Moreover, certain powerful Russian business groupings use economic entities in Belarus - in arrangements closely involving Lukashenka's administration -as intermediaries, for their business in Western and Central Europe and elsewhere. If it can be shown to the Russians that because of strained relations with the West doing business with Lukashenka were to become unprofitable, this might motivate them to put extra pressure on Lukashenka to introduce democratic concessions. This issue could be of particular importance in the context of the elections to the joint "Russia-Belarus Parliament", which could possibly take place as early as next spring.

It has to be admitted, though, that in the present international context it is not likely to expect a Western rift with Russia over Belarus. Meanwhile, the question of how the West could target the regime of Belarus without isolating the nation and without appearing to make concessions in this war of nerves is a question for which the policy makers seemingly as yet have no answer.

Similarly, some left-wing and left-centre opposition figures in Belarus have suggested some form of collaboration with Lukashenka's regime and infiltration of his power structures by their own 'agents of influence'. But Lukashenka is unlikely to allow erstwhile opponents into his all-important "vertical" power structures. Rather, it is much more likely that there will be a purge of those he feels gave him insufficiently enthusiastic support during the recent campaign.

Additionally, although the September 2001 defeat might have inspired some politicians to adopt a more moderate stance, it has in no way alleviated the dissatisfaction of the democracy-minded public in Belarus. Hence forms of reconciliation or co-operation with Lukashenka's power structures - however tempting they might appear now to some opposition leaders - would undoubtedly not have the support of the present grass-root opposition constituency there.

Others in Belarus envisage forms of mass civil resistance including campaigns of mass political strikes and street protests. But the small and dispirited pro-democracy parties of Belarus or the trade unions are in no position to organize and implement this in the near future. Furthermore the formation of a political force appropriate and capable for

such a scenario would demand considerable time, determination, and resources.

Such differences, as well as a divergence of views regarding the legitimacy and/or expediency of participating in the "Russia-Belarus Parliament", provide little ground for holding the "broad civic coalition" together in the future. More to the point, the fact that the strategy of the "single candidate" was the raison d'etre of the coalition suggests that there is little chance to preserve the unprecedented unity achieved before the elections, and that any new coalition will, accordingly, have to be constructed on different principles.

A successful strategy would hence require a coming together and resonance of internal and external conditions. Creating such conditions will demand a lot of determination and resources. In any case, the validity of the former approach, which envisaged bringing about the demise of the autocratic regime without actually destabilizing it has been substantially lost.

What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that in today's Belarus, free and fair elections can no longer be thought of as a means of ousting Lukashenka from power. Any other option will demand a fundamental restructurisation of the opposition. Whenever and however Lukashenka eventually departs from the political scene - he is unlikely to do so willingly.

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STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME

By Alexander Campbell and Cathy Fitzpatrick

The fundamentally unfree and unfair presidential elections of September 2001 in Belarus are more than just another link in the long chain of Alexander Lukashenko's violations of the internationally accepted code of democratic behavior.

The opposition's dismal failure at the polls on September 9 have become a moment of truth for both Belarusian democrats and the West: both have little choice now but to deal with a the man dubbed "Europe's last dictator" for five more years.

The West's reaction to this latest demonstration of the Belarusian dictator's total disregard for democratic standards can be described as ambivalent at best. Although most Western European states and international organizations acknowledged that the elections were fraudulent, instead of applying further pressure on the regime, they began to mumble about how "counterproductive" it would be to isolate Belarus. The absurdity of this stance is obvious to anyone who has followed events in Belarus and understands the nature of these Soviet totalitarian-wannabe regimes.

Like better-known Soviet dictators before him and the wily Milosevic, Lukashenko has time and again cynically manipulated all the feeble attempts of European and international human rights bodies to introduce at least some semblance of civility into his roughshod rule over Belarus. Lukashenko's tactic was to signal a seeming willingness to conduct negotiations with the opposition on certain relevant issues through proxies. Then, the minute he was able to win time to regroup and also various political dividends, like a sham image as "flexible" before an OSCE summit, he would then abruptly derail and even revert the whole negotiation process.

The awful human rights crimes of the regime for the last 5 years are well documented by such groups as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and here on the League's pages and at www.belarusupdate.org. These reports are backed up by the assessments of the UN, the OSCE, and the U.S. State Department. They range from deploying police to disperse peaceful opposition marches brutally and harass the independent media to beatings, arrests and imprisonment of opposition leaders. Most ominous is that independent observers and journalists at home and abroad, as well as various prosecutors, secret police, and regime cronies who have fled abroad, are unanimous in their conviction that Lukashenko and the members of his inner circle are directly responsible for the disappearance and likely assassination of four prominent political opponents in the last two years as well as extrajudicial execution of mafia kingpins.

But was Belarus isolated for this appalling behavior - disappearances in a European country outside of a zone of armed conflict, something not seen on this scale since the Stalin era? Not at all. European states and international organizations like the Council of Europe and the European Union fretted and sent fact-finding missions and clucked and called for "dialogue." These policies never amounted to anything that can be called "isolation" by any stretch. The investment of Germany, Austria, Romania, and other European nations have only increased in recent years, following Russia's continued investment and bailouts. Lukashenko escaped with barely a slap on the wrist for both the shooting down and killing of two American air balloon pilots in 1995 and the forceful eviction of 11 ambassadors from their residencies in 1997. Visa-restrictions, imposed on Lukashenko and his government officials, though initially effective, were abolished soon after Lukashenko promised to behave. The result is well-known - in 1998 he went to Istanbul summit of OSCE, shanghaied President Clinton somewhere in the corridors, and declared afterwards on local TV that Belarus was once again a full-fledged member of the international community. Lukashenko not only ignored the obligations taken by Belarus at the summit, but also resumed the persecution of independent media and democratic opposition with renewed zeal.

The fitful OSCE-sponsored domestic "round-table" dialogue with the opposition and the regime quickly fizzled out, even with the members of parties who had lost their leaders to disappearances bravely persevered in a positive spirit. For his troubles, Amb. Hans-Georg Wick, outgoing head of the OSCE mission in Minsk, was repeatedly and publicly insulted by Lukashenko, and almost driven out of the country, before he announced he was resigning "for personal reasons."

Now that the final reports from OSCE are issued stating unambiguously that the presidential elections were rigged, the contrast between dictatorship and democracy has grown all the more painfully obvious. Instead of resuming the pressure following this fandago, Europe is again contemplating "engaging Belarus in a dialogue" to "avoid isolation."

Needless to say, the regime gleefully ignored Part I of the West's pronouncements - the indictment of the flawed elections - and has hyped Part II - the call for dialogue -- in its hysterical propaganda war with the d emocratic opposition, branded as "extrem-

ist" or "unconstructive." Lukashenko is now claiming on the airwaves that the West de-facto has recognized his victory and realized the failure of its previous policies towards Minsk.

The American reaction was distinctly different. The U.S. and Europe often endeavor to paper over differences in tactics for dealing with dictators, but the evidence of a disagreement is visible when tracking European calls for dialogue and U.S. condemnation. Despite understandable preoccupation with the tragic events of September 11, the U.S. was quick to call the Belarusian elections a sham and point out that Lukashenko in fact had stolen them from the Belarusian people. Officials continued protest the failure to investigate and prosecute the four politically-motivated disappearances. Senator Jesse Helms, outgoing chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced to the Committee a bill titled the "Belarus Democracy Act of 2001", which called both for tough sanctions against the Lukashenko regime and the political and financial assistance to promote of democracy and civil society in Belarus.

The bill would require considerable effort on the Hill to become a law, although interestingly, some Congressional offices do understand the relationship between the global war against terrorism and the problem of the last remaining dictator in Europe, charged with unsavory contacts with rogue regimes and unlawful arms deals. Even $37 million delivered directly tomorrow would not be sufficient; the West generated about $40 million for the Serb opposition just for one occasion, the effort to overturn Milosevic at the ballot box.

But help is required, and fast, and it is not only for the sake of abstract principles. For the Belarusian democratic opposition, the presidential elections of September 2001 brought results that are devastating. In the wake of the post 9-9 and post 9-11 shocks, old tactical and strategic differences between various Belarusian political factions from the left to right, which constitute the anti-Lukashenko front, have flared anew, almost destroying the fragile equilibrium actually reached in support of a single, united candidate, Vladimir Goncharik, in the period preceding the elections. To the regime's amusement, financial scandals, followed by a lot of hand wringing and finger pointing ensued among opposition forces, weakening them even further. The reality is that even if the charges of mismanagement of foreign aid stick - and they hardly appear to do so in a democratic court of law -the amounts are so tiny as to become merely a legacy of the West's betrayal of democracy in Eastern Europe.

Leaders of Belarusian democratic forces, faced with the reality of Lukashenko spending another 5 years at the helm, seem to be at a loss, when chartering the course for their parties in the deepening gloom and doom of Belarusian future. They need help - and not just a handout and a few "dialogue" round-tables with regime hacks, but genuine political support in bilateral and multilateral contexts.

What should and could the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies do to resolve the continuing constitutional and political crisis in Belarus, and what is the place in all this of Belarusian opposition?

In view of both the track record of the Belarusian regime and its recent anti-democratic actions, it would hardly seem necessary to argue that the well-trodden track long advocated by Europeans - facilitating the so-called political dialogue between the regime and the opposition - has lead nowhere, and actually helped seal a dictator's power. Lukashenko will again resort to his time-honed techniques of first stalling any actual progress by engaging in sham dialogue with opposition, then getting maximum political concessions from the West, and, finally - abolishing its results when his absolute chokehold on the country is even remotely threatened. The last five years of ineffectual policies implemented by the West have already taught the Belarusian dictator the lesson learned before him by countless bullies, and best described by an old adage-"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me".

Even more, by securing the de-facto control over the country for five more years, (to a large extent - thanks to the acquiescence of Russia), he has become even more contemptuous of both the West's opinion and internal opposition.

That leaves Euro-Atlantic community with only one choice - to actually try to apply real political and economic pressure on Belarus, in order to force the regime to take meaningful steps towards democratization. Real, hands-on, rigorous isolation of the regime should actually be tried through visa denials, and end to the kind of hand-holding sessions recently held by German politicians and businessmen, and further measures, some outlined in the Helms' bill, should be tried. They must be supplemented by authentic engagement and real support of the emerging civil society in Belarus - and that means an end to mixed delegations of regime-tools and independents yoked together in travels to trainings at the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It means and end to meanderings around the corridors of PACE in search of an opportunity to reinstall the phony Belarusian parliament - when the CIS parliament representatives already carry water at PACE for the Belarusian regime. It means dozens of other gestures and real actions - chief of which means going to Moscow and telling Vladimir Putin to stop supporting and subsidizing Kooky Lukie, as he has been dubbed in Washington - first and foremost, by stopping the Belarusian real-estate grab by the Russian mob and their cronies in Minsk.

The West needs to stop whining about split and weak oppositions in Minsk. The opposition is split because they vie for support among Germany, U.S., and even Russia, struggling to find a combination that might work. It is the West that is divided in its approach to how to deal with dictators, and it is the West that is ambivalent about how to deal with Russia, and it has transferred this sorry state of affairs on to a fragile, beleaguered, and rather impoverished opposition. As one observer said once memorably, "Why does the West put pressure on us to unite, and not put pressure on Lukashenko to stop disappearing us?"

The only state with any semblance of principled and logical stance on Belarusian issue is the U.S. Whatever its numerous challenges in the post-911 world, it must retain this position and not slide into any kind of wobbling stance under Euro-pressure. Instead, it must continue to raise with European allies and democrats from Asia to Africa the necessary coalition of the willing for democracy. Many in Belarusian opposition acknowledge, that by firmly establishing the fact that the last elections deemed free and fair by the international community took place in 1995, and by building upon this foundation, with minimal but still staunch support to those seeking democracy and the rule of law, the United States have secured for themselves the role of the most influential external factor in Belarusian politics.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. has now become the special object of Lukashenko's ire, because it is the only country which has managed to force the regime to pay adequate compensation for

forcing the American ambassador out of his residence - a seemingly small and obscure but highly symbolic victory. According to well-informed sources and judging by a recent hysterical fit thrown by Lukashenko when asked about the Helms bill, reaction in Minsk to "Belarus Democracy Act of 2001" is verging on panic.

This proves, that authorities there well understand the difference between the stick of concrete economic and political sanctions, combined with the stone of practical support to the opposition, as distinct from the words of numerous well-wishers from international bureaucracies paid to monitor - but not really take sides in - the struggle for democracy. Thus, the solution for the Belarusian problem -- emblematic of the kinds of dictatorships that foster terrorism against their own people and others a round the globe -- lies in devising a clear and non-negotiable list of preconditions, supported by a set of coordinated measures, which Europe and the U.S. should be ready to take in the likely event of the regime's continued refusal to engage in authentic dialogue and democratic reform, above all the end to human rights violations.

As far as the Belarusian democratic opposition is concerned, its soul-searching should start with answering simple questions: Is it possible to change this regime through dialogue and negotiations? Can you ignore the fact, that in seven years in power Lukashenko moved from intimidation and harassment of his opponents to their physical extermination? Naturally, there are at least two opposing schools of thought among the leaders of Belarusian democratic opposition, but there is no need to exacerbate this difference through the conflicting Western pressures from America or Europe.

While searching for the answers, budding Belarusian civil society should be aware of the fact, that this time not only the position of the West, but the very future of democratic and independent Belarus is at stake. The West should stay out of the oppositions consultations and efforts to reorganize itself, and provide external assistance by pressuring Lukashenko with sanctions, and funding an organized and pluralistic democratic opposition in Belarus which can surely rise to this occasion.

If the West simply cannot get its act together to apply these types of sanctions and aid packages, then if nothing else, it must maintain a loud and thundering silence, the silence of delegitimization. Whatever its weaknessees, an institution like OSCE has an incredible tool to wield - the failure to pronounce approval of an election, a policy, a leader. That means an end to dialogue with the deaf, round-tables, seminars, and coffee clutches, and simply a do-nothing, non-legitimization stance. *Nature then might be free to take its course*

Source: Belarus Update (**http;//www.belarusupdate.org**)

Virtual Foreign Policy in Belarus and Russia

By Taras Kuzio

Since the mid-1990s Belarus and Russia have declared a "union" as their strategic foreign policy goal. But, as a Russian newspaper recently put it: "The five years of the existence of the Russian-Belarusan union demonstrated that it is possible to declare (this union) but impossible to create it."[1] Vladimir Voronin, the communist who was elected Moldova's president only nine months ago, abandoned his earlier pledge to take Moldova into the union, dismissing it as "more words than real action." He saw no benefit to Moldova in joining a virtual union.

The union between Russia and Belarus was a consequence of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's election in July 1994 and his establishment of an authoritarian regime. Russian President Boris Yeltsin was interested in playing the nationalist and pan-Slavic card in order to draw away voters from his main challenger in the 1996 presidential elections, Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov.

Two years into the project, Lukashenka was complaining that things were moving slowly and that Russia was not "ready" for a union. A year later he accused Russia of approaching the union question in an unserious manner.

With Vladimir Putin's election as Russia's president, Lukashenka changed his tune. Putin, who has re-instituted Russia's Soviet-era national anthem, has also described the union as an "epochal event" that "paves the way to a union of states that will require a judicial basis and a common economic, defense, and humanitarian space." For the time being, however, the union remains virtual.

THE UNION AS A STEP TOWARDS REVIVING THE SOVIET UNION?

It remains unclear whether the union is to be a stepping stone to reviving the Soviet Union in a new form or to a different type of union. On a visit to Cuba this year Lukashenka noted President Castro's "fervent support" for the union: the Cuban leader presumably hopes it will lead to the revival of the Soviet Union. However, neither a revived Soviet Union nor a new union are of interest to any other CIS leader, including Russophile states like Armenia, Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. President Leonid Kuchma has more than once ruled out Ukraine's membership in the union. Nevertheless, Russian nationalists and communists remain optimistic that the CIS states queue up to join as soon as the union is created.

Plans to broaden membership have always faced two fundamental problems. First, the union was only backed by the communists in the other CIS states. In Belarus this is clouded even further because one Communist Party backs the union while another opposes it. In Ukraine, everyone to the right of the communists, including Oleksandr Moroz' Socialists, reject it. Second, only Belarus believes that the union will lead to a relationship of equal states both of which will retain their sovereignty. Everybody else, from the Belarusan opposition to all other noncommunists in the remaining ten CIS states, see the union as the loss of Belarusan sovereignty to Russia.

This is also how Central Europe and the West see it.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Military integration and cooperation has gone further than economic. "Economic integration has simply not come about."[2] The union cost Russia US$1.5-2 billion per annum in 1996-1997, according to Andrei Illarionov, Director of the Moscow-based Institute of Economic Analysis and Putin's economic adviser. This cost is due to Russia writing off Belarus' energy debts, charging it around one third of the price it charges Ukraine for gas and allowing Belarus to exploit their customs union by taxing goods in transit from Russia via Belarus.

The Belarusan Chamber of Representatives, the upper house of parliament, voted on April 12 to ratify an agreement to intro-

duce a single Russian-Belarusan currency on January 1, 2005. The ratification of the accord was tied to Russia's dispersal of a US$100 million credit. If a joint currency is in fact introduced in three years time this will significantly increase Russia's influence over Belarusan domestic affairs.

The reconciliation of two very different economies and economic policies in Belarus and Russia may yet impede the speedy introduction of a joint currency. Putin--at least publicly— remains committed to economic reform within an authoritarian political structure. Lukashenka, on the other hand, regards the post-Soviet economic reforms conducted in Russia, Ukraine and some other CIS states as disastrous.

What, then, is Lukashenka's solution to the problem of reconciling economies with different levels of reform? The answer is staring Russia in the face, Lukashenka believes: "Russia should make an effort to employ our model of reform as soon as possible. We are showing Russia how an economy should be reformed, with a view to Russia's mistakes."[3]

Unfortunately for Lukashenka, Yeltsin did not listen to this advice. Neither is Putin likely to do so. Orienting Belarus towards Russia and obtaining direct and indirect Russian subsidies postpones dealing with economic problems in Belarus, such as its inflation rate, which is the highest in the CIS. Union with Russia is "actually saving our country and our economy," Lukashenka believes, because it allows him to maintain living standards.

MILITARY INTEGRATION

Russia has obtained what it seeks from Belarus within the military sphere. Lukashenka, however, is prepared to go much further than Russia in creating a "300,000-man joint Belarusan-Russian military group"--a proposal Putin has not supported given that the need for such a large military force is unclear. Against whom would it be aimed? Poland, the Baltic states, NATO, Ukraine or all of them? The proposal smacks more of Lukashenka's Sovietophile, xenophobic and ideologically driven view of the outside world. This view of the world contradicts Russia's more pragmatic relationship with the West and NATO, a relationship that has grown into an informal alliance since the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. With Russia half seriously talking about future membership of NATO and lessening its objections to NATO enlargement, Lukashenka's worldview is not in line with Putin's.

In addition, Belarus' usefulness in military terms is less than meets the eye. For all of Lukashenka's Sovietophile views, he has never expressed any interest in security issues in the Trans-Caucasus or Central Asia. Belarusan armed forces are forbidden by law to operate outside their republic. Although Belarus is a member of the CIS Collective Security Treaty it plays no role in CIS security or peacekeeping operations in Tajikistan-Central Asia's border with Afghanistan-Abkhazia or South Ossetia. A poll by the Belarusan Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies found 52 percent of Belarusans are afraid that a union with Russia would lead to Belarusan armed forces being dispatched to "hot spots" like Chechnya.

RUSSIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS

Russia has been very happy to reciprocate Belarusan support within the international arena by turning a blind eye to human rights abuses in Belarus. As Putin admitted, "The Russian Federation has always backed the Belarusan position at international forums. So it has been and so it will continue."[4] Yeltsin's human rights commissioner, Oleg Mironov, conferred a spotless human rights record on Belarus after a visit to "dispel the myths about human rights violations in Belarus." He claimed that Belarus has an independent judicial system, constitutional court and supreme court, guarantees the right of an opposition to exist, no interethnic conflicts and a civil code. Russian and CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly officials have given glowing reports about the "fairness" of Belarusan elections.

Turning a blind eye to human rights abuses in Belarus not only ignores the views of all Western countries, multilateral bodies and international human rights organizations, but even Belarusan violations of Russian human rights. Lukashenka has repeatedly criticized the Russian media for its mocking and critical portrayal of himself and Belarus. His response has been to occasionally cut off Russian television broadcasts. If Ukraine curtailed Russian television in such a manner, the Russian Foreign Ministry and parliament would undoubtedly denounce this as an "infringement of the rights of Russian speakers." Not though, in the case of Russia's closest ally, Belarus. Even the murder of an ORT cameraman, Dmitry Zavadsky, by a Belarusan presidential death squad did not stir Russia's Foreign Ministry, parliament or nationalist organizations to action. Again, one can imagine the outcry if he had been murdered in Ukraine.

CONFUSED OPINION POLLS

There has never been overwhelming support in Belarus for a union with Russia. The idea enjoys greater support than does integration with Europe, but backing for the union with Russian has never gone above fifty per cent. Zerkalo, the sociological service of the Belapan Information Company, found that only 47 percent of Minsk residents supported unification with Russia while 20 percent disapproved. A poll taken by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies nationwide found that 47 percent supported a union, 34 percent opposed it and 16 percent said they would boycott a referendum on the issue. Given the country's authoritarian political environment, Belarusans do not have the opportunity to freely express their will on this question. Lukashenka's pet project is opposed by one of the country's two communist parties and anti-Russian national democrats along with centrist business, Russophone and former nomenklatura political interests. If this alternative viewpoint to union were allowed equal access to the media it is not at all certain Lukashenka's pet project would be successful.

Belarusans are also only too aware that standards of living are higher in Poland than in Russia. A poll by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies found 85 percent saw life in Poland as preferable to life in Russia. Asked to name exemplary countries, 40 percent said Germany, 20 percent said the United States and only 0.5 percent said Russia.

VIRTUAL UNION OR GUBERNIA?

Lukashenka's pet project suffers from being a virtual policy that lacks clear-cut definitions and goals. Neither Lukashenka nor Belarusans are at all clear what kind of "union" they seek. In the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies poll, 63 percent answered affirmatively to the question "Do you want Belarus to be an independent, sovereign country." Only 10 percent said no. Does union mean that Belarus will join Russia as a gubernia or autonomous republic? Within the large body of Russian supporters of union with Belarus, the communists, who most closely follow moves on integration, define "union" as Belarus becoming part of Russia. Russian nationalists agree with their communist allies.

Polls taken to measure support for a "union" between Belarus and Russia fail to come to come to grips with how "union" is de-

fined. A similar problem exists when dealing with pro-union support in Eastern Ukraine. When polls seek to ascertain support for a "union" that is only vaguely defined, it obtains high support. When "union" is defined more clearly as full political unification, support for union in Belarus drops by half. Clear majorities in both Russia and Belarus back a "union" that does not harm their independence. The type of "union" that has large support is one that is opposed to Belarus being absorbed by Russia, would give both parties greater sovereignty than in the former federal Soviet Union and more closely resembles a confederation. Belarusans assume that integration into a union will not harm their sovereignty — a proposition that is naive, to say the least. A decade of Belarusan independence has increased the number of Belarusans who appreciate independence and are therefore opposed to any union that would harm this status. "The sovereignty and independence of the Belarus state are sacred notions to every citizen," Lukashenka said[5], because they remain "inflexible and unshakeable." Lukashenka has always categorically rejected proposals from Russian Communists, and at times former President Yeltsin, that a union meant the six oblasts of Belarus becoming part of Russia. "No president of Belarus would take that step. Belarus had more sovereignty in the Soviet Union," Lukashenka complained.[6] "Even Stalin did not plan to deprive Belarus of its sovereignty," Lukashenka has claimed.[7] In his eyes, the union would be between two equal sovereign states, something one finds difficult to imagine when one side has a population 150 times larger. Lukashenka, with his ideological amalgam of Soviet Belarusan nationalism and pan-Slavism, is highly wary of some within Russia. He has said he will always defend his country's sovereignty because he possesses sufficient "healthy nationalism" to secure the country's interests. Some Russian circles, he has complained, believe for some reason that Belarusans "have only recently climbed down from the trees and have eaten all the bark and leaves from these trees..." and thus are forced to seek Russian aid. Such a view is wrong, humiliating and offensive to Belarusan "national dignity," he said.[8] Lukashenka has regularly complained about the Russian media's portrayal of Belarusans as still wearing peasant clothes and only seeking to milk Russia because they are "beggars."[9]

THE UNION AND RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Fears of NATO enlargement have played less of a role in Russian support for a union with Belarus than its own confused post-Soviet identity. This confusion is also found in Belarus.[10] Belarusan Foreign Minister Ivan Antanpvich told the Russian Academy of Sciences that the union was based on a "1000 year tradition of making a great state," a historical myth. Such a state should be "Slavic Orthodox." The Russian Orthodox patriarch sees this union differently, believing that Belarusan independence, like that of Ukraine, is a "misunderstanding." He believes that the union is a stepping stone towards gathering "the scared lands of the one and single fatherland." Lukashenka would only partly agree, because he seeks to reconcile his support for Belarusan independence, within an overall understanding of sovereignty developed in the Soviet Union, with his pan-Slavic yearning for closeness to Russia.

Belarusans and Russians look upon union in different ways because of the legacy of Soviet nationality policy. Both sides appeal to pan-Slavic sentiment, but Belarus also developed a Soviet Belarusan nationalism in the Soviet Union. The Russian SFSR had no separate institutions until 1990 and therefore territorial loyalty to this republic failed to develop among Russians. Russian loyalty was directed to the Soviet Union, while Belarusan loyalty was divided between Soviet Byelorussia and the Soviet Union. Russia has therefore inherited little sense of having an ethnic identity distinct from the Soviet Union — unlike Serbia in its relationship with Yugoslavia. The weakness of Russian ethnic nationalism has been clearly seen in the failure to mobilize the 25-million-strong Russian diaspora (the rebellion in Transdniester was backed by Russian-speaking Sovietophile elites). Russian organizations in Ukraine, Belarus and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union appeal to supra-national--not exclusively Russian ethnic — issues. President Putin told the Congress of Russian Compatriots (i.e. Russian speakers) in October that they spiritually belonged to the Russian nation, a view that must disturb Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia and Latvia (but not, presumably, Belarus). Only 68 percent of Russians consider themselves Slavs and 22 percent deny it, according to a Public Opinion Foundation poll. Russians and Belarusans constantly refer to themselves as being close in "roots, language and culture," as Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and State Duma Chairman Gennady Seleznev have put it, and the citizens of one state do not feel like they are in a foreign country when traveling to the other.[11] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Valery Serov sees Belarus and Russia as having been split apart.

TOWARDS A VIRTUAL UNION

The evolution and amorphousness of the Belarusan-Russian union reflects the inherited confused identities found in both Belarus and Russia where the "union" idea is defined in different ways. The slow progress in realizing their union is also due to the fact that Russia is more interested in developing relations on the international stage as a great power, through an alliance with the United States.

NOTES

1 *Vedomosti*, 23 March 2001.
2 *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 3 July 2001.
3 *Delovoy Mir*, 18 December 1997.
4 *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 18 April 2000.
5 *Belapan*, 1 January 1999.
6 *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 23 May 1998.
7 *Interfax*, 30 July 1999.
8 *Respublika*, 6 July 1999.
9 *Yantarnyi Krai*, 2 September 1999.
10 Clelia Rontoyanni, A Russian-Belarusan 'Union-State': a defensive response to Western enlargement? Working Paper 10, 2000, One Europe or Several? (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2000).
11 *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 8-14 May 1997 and *Rabochaya Tribuna*, 14 March 1997.

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Source: *PRISM*, November 2001, Volume VII, Issue 11 (http://www.jamestown.org)

Ten Years Since Dissolution of Soviet Union

Shushkevich, Kravchuk on Dissolution of USSR

Ten years ago, on 8 December 1991, Belarus's Supreme Soviet Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a document stating that "the Soviet Union as a geopolitical reality [and] a subject of international law has ceased to exist." The document simultaneously announced the creation of a new entity in the post-USSR territory — the Commonwealth of Independent States. The document — now widely known as the Belavezha Agreement — was signed in a government villa in Viskuli in Belarus's Belavezha Forest, which is Europe's only primeval wooded area.

On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, stepped down, delivering a coup de grace for the 69-year-old superpower that was vilified for posterity by U.S. President Ronald Reagan as the "Evil Empire." Commenting on that momentous event to a number of media outlets last week, both Shushkevich and Kravchuk admitted that they did not expect any historic act to take place during their meeting with Yeltsin in Viskuli on 7-8 December 1991. "Nothing had been done [in advance], all was written down on the spot [in Viskuli]," Shushkevich told the Minsk-based *"Nasha svaboda"* on 7 December. "In any case, if something had been prepared beforehand, I didn't know about that. Of course, there were some prepared documents, but not for the agreement [on the dissolution of the USSR]. The talks between the government delegations concerned economic issues."

In the Kyiv-based *"Fakty"* on 7 December, Kravchuk added an interesting detail to the meeting in the Belavezha Forest. "After we considered everything in the evening of 7 December in Belavezha, Yeltsin ordered his team to draft a document — a statement or declaration. We had not yet decided on a name for the document. Yeltsin's aides wrote that document and left it for a woman to type it up in the morning (we had only one typist in the Belavezha Forest). Since her office was already locked, they slid the document into the office through a slit under the door. But in the morning the typist said: 'I haven't found anything.' There was no document! It turned out that a cleaning woman, who came to the office earlier, saw some papers on the floor and swept them away. Korzhakov [first deputy chief of Russia's Main Protection Directorate] was sent to look for the missing document.... Frankly speaking, I didn't know then that the draft agreement was lost. I was told about that only recently by [former Russian Foreign Minister] Andrei Kozyrev." Kravchuk dismissed the rumors circulating especially among post-Soviet communists that Yeltsin was talked into signing the Belavezha Agreement after he had too much to drink. "We came to the forest on 7 December in the evening. We had a dinner. During the dinner — yes! — there was Belavezha vodka [Belarus's fine herbal vodka] there. I drank it, too. I don't know what Yeltsin was doing after we parted. But on 8 December in the morning, when we met to work on the document, Yeltsin was as sober as a judge. I don't exaggerate! He was in good form, vigorous, he had ideas.... All of us [present there] saw him and everybody can confirm that Yeltsin and all of us were fully aware [of what we were doing]."

Kravchuk underscored the impact of Ukraine's independence referendum on the adoption of the Belavezha Agreement. A week earlier, on 1 December 1991, more than 90 percent of Ukrainians supported the country's independence in a referendum. The same day, Kravchuk was elected as the first president of independent Ukraine with some 63 percent of the vote. "I said there: Ukraine voted for independence and elected me as president. So, may I have a position different from that of the people? [It would be] ridiculous. Therefore, I am obliged to act as the people willed.... In other words, the 1 December referendum had a historic importance. If there had been no Ukrainian referendum, the Belavezha Forest meeting would have produced no result," Kravchuk said.

After the agreement was signed, Yeltsin telephoned U.S. President George Bush and told him what had happened. And then Shushkevich briefed Gorbachev. "He [Gorbachev] inquired in a very haughty manner, 'Have you considered how the world will react?' I said Yeltsin was on the phone to Bush and he had taken it well," Shushkevich told Reuters.

Today, Shushkevich assesses the Belavezha Agreement as historic not only for Belarus and Ukraine, but also for Russia itself. Until that day, Russia— which was automatically associated or even identified with the Soviet Union— did not exist as a separate political entity. "The Belavezha Agreement has an all-important, historic significance in terms of our sovereignty.

For the first time in the past 200 years, Russia recognized Belarus's independence, as well as that of Ukraine. This is what the Belavezha Agreement meant to me and Kravchuk. But we also recognized the independence of Russia — her independence from the Soviet Union. So here you have the [whole] meaning of the Belavezha Agreement," Shushkevich told *"Nasha svaboda."*

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, December 11, 2001

NEW BILL IN U.S. SENATE WOULD ISOLATE MINSK

Three months ago, Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka celebrated what he called a "shining" landslide win in the ex-Soviet republic's second presidential election since independence in 1991.

Now, a veteran American politician is working on legislation he hopes will eventually be a shining victory over Lukashenka.

Senator Jesse Helms, the senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and its former chairman, has submitted a bill proposing a tough mix of isolation of the Minsk government and robust economic assistance to its democratic opposition in a bid to bring down Lukashenka.

The "Belarus Democracy Act 2001" is unlikely to be enacted into legislation this year. The bill is still seeking sponsorship in the House of Representatives — the other half of Congress.

But an aide to Helms, who spoke on the condition that his name not be used, said the senator would push the bill once Congress kicks off its 2002 session in January. The aide also said some House members have expressed interest in sponsoring a version of the bill and that he was confident the legislation could eventually be passed next year.

In the past, Helms co-sponsored legislation that imposed economic sanctions on Fidel Castro's Cuba.

His latest bill, if approved, would allocate $30 million in aid to Minsk's opposition — or about three times what its supporters

currently receive from Washington. Besides political parties, the money would go to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the independent media, and international exchanges and professional training programs — all in a bid to build democracy.

Perhaps most significantly, the bill would impose on Minsk a series of sanctions that would contradict explicit recent recommendations by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) not to isolate the country — despite what the OSCE dubbed neither free nor fair elections in September.

Although the U.S. has maintained a critical position toward Lukashenka, the bill would significantly harden its policy known as "selective engagement," which allows for only limited and generally low-level contact between the two governments.

Still, a State Department official told RFE/RL that the department does not disagree with the substance of the proposed legislation. The official added that Minsk has been one of the few governments in the world not to offer any support to the U.S. following the 11 September terrorist attacks.

Under the bill, the U.S. government would oppose any financial assistance to Belarus from the main international financial institutions; freeze any assets held by the government or senior leaders of Belarus in the United States; prohibit exports of any goods from the U.S. to entities controlled by the Belarus government; and forbid any contracts between Americans and Belarusian government-owned entities.

The sanctions would only be lifted once Minsk released political prisoners from jail, such as businessman Andrey Klimau; stopped harassing opposition media, NGOs, and politicians; and provided a full and complete accounting of the four opposition figures who have disappeared in recent years.

The bill would also deny entry into the U.S. of anyone in a senior post in the Belarusian government or an immediate relation of such a person. And it calls on Russia to cease support of the Lukashenka government and respect Minsk's sovereignty, and urges the U.S. to seek the backing of European allies to apply similar sanctions against Belarus.

Catherine Fitzpatrick is the executive director of the International League for Human Rights, which has consultative status with the United Nations and works closely on Belarus. Fitzpatrick said the bill may be too harsh in some sanctions, and that it could be diplomatically counterproductive as some could wonder why the U.S. is working with other authoritarian regimes, such as Uzbekistan, a key ally in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, yet singling out Minsk.

But generally, Fitzpatrick supports the bill and believes the U.S. must take a harder stance on Lukashenka and urge the European Union to do so as well: "I would like to see it go, but I think that given everybody else's concern about everything from Afghanistan reconstruction to Pakistan to Somalia to North Korea - - this is not on the top of the list. But it is something we support and should be supported."

The OSCE has said isolation would harm the Belarusian people, but Fitzpatrick said the OSCE should stop consulting with Minsk --something it has never tried as a policy since Lukashenka took over in 1994. She said Minsk should be treated in the same way the West treated the Soviet Union — with firm, consistent condemnation.

Fitzpatrick added that while she was uncertain about the bill's potential to be approved, she has noticed that a lot of people in the Belarusian government are starting to worry that it might be.

(The report was written by Jeffrey Donovan, RFE/RL's correspondent in Washington.)

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, December 18, 2001

BELARUS' FORUM

KURAPATY: Is Bolshevism Alive and Thriving ?

by Valancina Tryhubovic

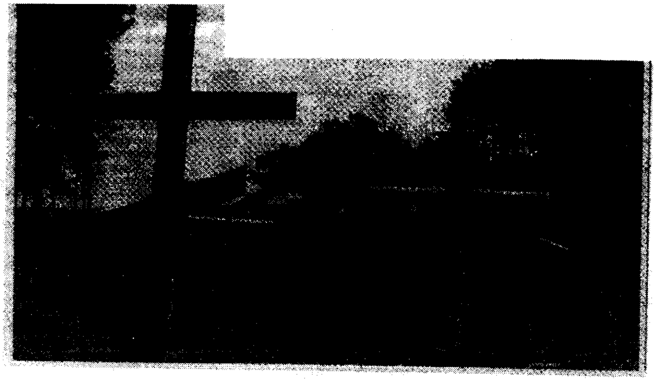
The Day of Commemorating the Dead ("Dziady", November 2) revives the issue of the infamous Kurapaty burial ground in the suburb of Miensk, where during Stalin times massive executions of people took place. Nowadays its destiny is in the center of hot disputes.

Following is an excerpt from an editorial by Valancina Tryhubovic that appeared the October 2001 issue of *Belarusian Perspective*, an independent monthly published in Miensk.

More than 10 years since the "discovery" of Kurapaty officials have yet to appropriately recognize the place where so many of their predecessors perished. People continue to use the area for outings - picking berries, picnicking and walking the dogs. Scavengers have been digging up the burial mounds and scattering bones all over the forest. Crosses were erected and then often vandalized, and the memorial bench given by the American people was destroyed. All complaints and requests to protect and respect the necropolis remained unanswered. And now the bulldozers ...

In one of the metings of the preservation initiative Jakau Gutman said: "We live in a country where temples are being destroyed and buildings are being built on top of blood and bones." - referring to the recent demolition of the Miensk synagogue and to Kurapaty.

People who were buried by force under the earth of Kurapaty came from various nationalities and religions. Until today they have remained nameless and and haven't been recognized as innocent victims of the ideological genocide. Unfortunately, the sovietized society, being materialistic and atheistic, is accepting moral postulates very slowly and with great difficulty. Pointing out the necessity of repentance is like crying in the wilderness - nobody hears it. However, without such repentance the normal development of society is impossible. Without it the division of society into "us" and "them" will persist; and the outwardly invisible civil war will continue. **The conflict in Kurapaty offers a chance to reach understanding and truce.** The authorities and the society should not be enemies, but partners in building their country and a normal life for all its citizens. They should begin a dialogue in order to remove misunderstandings and work out a common plan of action. I understand that it is not at all simple. I know the mentality of our officials; whenever they encounter an opponent, they consider it their duty to "crush" him and to dictate and impose their own will. Whenever they encounter a resolute resistance, their rage is heightened. And I know the opponents: years of humiliation and insults have made them highly emotional and distrustful. They look on any concession or com-



promise as a betrayal. They want everything done their way and they want it *now* — everything and now. Movement or evolution to mutual understanding is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, only consequent and gradual steps may bring fruit. In the present situation each side should be ready to make a step toward its opponent. It is critical that these actions be realistic and essential. In my opinion, today we do not need requests (or demands) for erecting a large, grandiose and costly memorial or edifice in Kurapaty. We can postpone this for better times. However, it is absolutely necessary to put up a fenced enclosure and organize reliable protection of the necropolis against evil-doers of all kinds. The first step in this direction would cost nothing: the official transfer of the reservation territory under the city's jurisdiction. Making public the results of the investigation of 1997-99 would also cost very little. One should stop digging in Kurapaty itself; what is now needed is "digging" in the period archives - a matter for specialists such as historians, lawyers and journalists. The authorities should simply grant Kurapaty the status of a memorial site of the highest order and behave accordingly.

The decisions made by the government and the president in this matter will show the world whether Belarus strives to become an independent, emocratic state or preserve totalitarian stalinist methods in dealing with its own people.

The dead do not hurt anymore; they belong to Eternity. We look now to the living, and whether they will consciously act as savages or as civilized moral human beings.

The readiness to lie down in the earth of Kurapaty in front of a bulldozer should be perceived as an act of desperation, and not as a means of solving the problem. I pray to God that it doesn't come to that.

Peace to the departed; and rational and clear thinking for their descendants.

Source: *BELARUSIAN PERSPECTIVE*, October 2001

Ms. Valancina Tryhubovic is the editor-in-chief of BELARUSIAN PERSPECTIVE, organ of the intrnational civic association of the same name.

BELARUSIAN CULTURE

Chair in Belarusian Studies at EHU in Miensk

Following is a message of EHUF President David H. Swartz, the first U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, which appears in the fall issue of *Bridges*.

Welcome to this Fall issue of *Bridges*.

I hope you find the articles that follow on our Foundation and the European Humanities University to be interesting and stimulating. As always, I invite your involvement in our work as a Friend of EHU [. . . .]

I wish to use my space in this issue of *Bridges* to launch an initiative for creating and endowing a chair in Belarusian studies at EHU. That Belarus' rich, unique history and culture as one of the three East Slavic peoples is inadequately known and appreciated by the world community is perhaps understandable given the nation's position for much of the past under the control of powerful empires to the west-Poland-or east-Russia. (Nineteenth-century Belarusian emigrants to the U.S. typically identified themselves as Polish or Russian, depending on whether they were Roman Catholic or Orthodox.) That Belarusians themselves lack knowledge concerning their own national heritage and the structured means to obtain that knowledge is a serious problem, one that invites corrective academic measures.

In the modern era, as one benefactor of Wilsonian democratic principles Belarus became an independent country briefly following World War I. Then, as a result of the Russo-Polish War, the nascent nation-state was again divided between its two powerful neighbors, Poland and Russia. It remained so until World War II, which ended with the entire country coming under the control of the Soviet Union. As is well known, Belarusian independence was restored following the collapse of the USSR in 1991. But these brief political facts mask a truly rich history, culture, and language.

Belarusian is one of the three East Slavic literary languages. It was the official chancellery language in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania before it united with Poland. Francisak Skaryna, for whom the main thoroughfare of Minsk is named, was a contemporary of Martin Luther, both translating and printing the first Belarusian-language Bible in the 16th century. Belarusian intellectuals maintained strong ties to both West and East during the Middle Ages, developing in particular close links to cultural centers in Germany, France, and, later, Russia. Perhaps this is one reason for the strong strain of humanism, tolerance, and idealism making up the Belarusian psyche.

EHU has as one of its stated goals the following: "The European Humanities University aspires to contribute to anew generation of highly educated professionals in the field of economics, public life, and culture, capable of leading Belarus away from the

heritage of totalitarianism toward an open society, based on the values of European civilization."

Establishment of the Center of Belarusian Studies at EHU, which we described in the last issue of "Bridges,aÄù was the first step toward introducing courses on Belarus' national heritage at the university and thus contributing to achieving the above objective. This framework now needs to be fleshed out both with course content and with academic staff to meet the growing student demands and needs. As quickly as possible EHU should be able to offer a major in Belarusian studies.

To this end, this Foundation herewith announces its initiative to endow the chair in Belarusian studies at EHU. Our goal is to secure $50,000 in funding initially, which in Belarus' current economic conditions should generate enough income to permit the program to be self-sustaining for many years. Naturally, over time we will strive to increase the endowment to permit expansion of faculty, obtain library and research materials, and support field work and internships.

This is a huge undertaking and a major challenge for the Foundation. I hope and anticipate that Belarusians in diaspora will help us take the lead in achieving this goal. But I encourage all of you, our readers and friends of Belarus and of EHU, whether of Belarusian origin or not, to contribute to turning this dream into a reality

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ECONOMY

Lukashenka Pledges to Open 'Floodgates' to Private Business

"It is necessary to open the floodgates for the development of transparent and fair entrepreneurship in the country," President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a meeting with businessmen on 19 October. Lukashenka asserted that Belarus has no fewer businesspeople than developed countries, but added that those people have little experience. According to the Belarusian leader, a "normal business community" has formed in the country over the last seven years.

According to him, some 1.7 million people work beyond the public economic sector. Lukashenka promised domestic businesses a substantial share in enterprises that are to be privatized. "I pledged during my re-election campaign that we will transform enterprises into joint-stock companies, sell shares in our enterprises. Money does not stink, this is a universal formula. And, probably, it is not so important where the money comes from. [But] for me this is important, I would like Belarusian businessmen to have a considerable share in enterprises that are to be privatized.... I say 'yes' to state control, [I say 'yes'] to foreign capital. But a share in the privatized enterprises should also be given to our businesses," Belapan quoted Lukashenka as saying.

"If we sell a 60 percent share [in an enterprise], at least 20 percent should go to [Belarusian] enterprises on preferential terms, because our [companies] are not as rich as others in the neighboring countries," Lukashenka said in explanation of his privatization policy. The Belarusian president said the government is planning to grant a "one-year amnesty for capital" in order to return Belarusian businesspeople's money to the country.

Lukashenka noted that the government is obliged to submit before the beginning of the next year a program to liberalize the economy, create a favorable investment climate, and ease the tax burden. He also pledged to cut short the list of businesses subject to licensing and review the system of tax breaks in order to curtail them.

Source: *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, October 22, 2001.*

Belarusian Economy Continues to Expand But Future Growth Is Uncertain

More conservative monetary and fiscal policy in 2001 has slowed economic growth in Belarus. The cause: a reduction of subsidies and credits to agriculture and industry. Through August, growth in GDP totaled only 3.0 percent. The Ministry of Statistics estimates that agriculture grew by 5.8 percent. Moreover, retail sales were strong because consumers were willing to spend more of their rising salaries now that inflation has slowed.Growth in retail sales helped to propel a 4.2 percent increase in the production of consumer goods, while overall industrial output grew by 4.3 percent through August. Nonetheless, a few segments of the economy are holding back overall growth. Investment remains flat, and declines in construction output continue to be a drag on the economy.

Rising industrial output continues to be fueled by demand for Belarusan goods in Russia, Belarus' key export market. The slowdown in Russian demand, however, will put the brakes on the very rapid growth in industrial output recorded over the past several years. The rate of industrial production has already slowed significantly since last year, when gross output of industry was up by 8.0 percent. Another factor in the rise in industrial production is that a number of the large, inefficient state-owned industries that dominate Belarusan production continue to produce significant numbers of goods for which there are no markets. As a result, inventories continue to grow in Belarusian warehouses.

Belarus' external balances have fared well this year. In the first seven months of 2001, the country posted a small customs-based trade deficit of US$7.9 million, compared with a much more substantial US$723.5 million deficit for the same period last year. Exports grew by 3.9 percent to US$4,299.4 million while imports fell by 11.4 percent to US$4,307.3 million. In the first quarter of 2001, Belarus recorded a surplus on the current account of US$227.6 million. In the past, Belarusan current-account deficits have been financed by Russian enterprises that have provided goods to Belarus without demanding cash prepayment, allowing Belarus to import beyond its means. However, it now appears that Russian oil companies and the gas monopoly Gazprom are beginning to force Belarus to pay for oil and gas shipments. If Russian firms continue to apply market principles in relations with their Belarusan counterparts, that could signal that trouble is ahead for the Belarusan economy (Ministry of Statistics, National Bank of Belarus).

Source: *Monitor, October 8, 2001* -(**http://www.jamestown.org**)

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Merger with Russia? (*The New York Times*, "Russia: Belarus Wants Quick Wedding," World Briefing, December 27, 2001) — Talks on a long-proposed union of Russia and Belarus, never trouble free, struck new sour notes at a meeting in Moscow of a council charged with consummating the merger. President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus accused the Kremlin of foot-dragging on plans to meld its economy with its far poorer neighbor in 2005, warning that "either we implement what we agreed or we make serious changes to our plans and say it openly." But President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia said the union's success rested on gradual implementation."

Armory for Terrorism (*The Washington Post*, "Europe's Armory for Terrorism, " January 3, 2002) — Mark Lenzi, a Fulbright scholar working in Lithuania and studying U.S. relations with Belarus points out that ... " The country in Europe that deserves the most attention for its support of terrorist groups and rogue states continues to receive the least. That is the lawless and undemocratic country of Belarus, under the rule of Alexander Lukashenko."

"Without a doubt no world leader benefited more from the September terror attacks than Lukashenko, Europe's last dictator, whose ultimate wish is to reunite the Soviet Union. Just as world scrutiny and condemnation were beginning to mount after his rigged and falsified presidential election of Sept.. 9, the tragic events two days later took Washington's quick glance away from this little-known and backward country.

Washington needs to wake up to what is happening in NATO's backyard: Belarus is quietly acting as a leading supplier of lethal military equipment to Islamic radicals — with terrorists and militant organizations in the Middle East, Balkans and Central Asia often the recipients.

... Many of Lukashenko's arms deals have followed a similar pattern: Weapons sent from Belarus are "diverted" from a listed destination country to an Islamic extremist group or a country under U.N. arms embargo while the Belarusian government officials cast a blind eye on the transactions.

... Lukashenko's efforts to sell weapons to generate much-needed income for his beleaguered economy appear to have no bounds. For a country of only 10 million people, it is unsettling that Belarus is ranked year after year among the top 10 weapons-exporting countries. To put in perspective how much military equipment left over from the Soviet Union Lukashenko has at his disposal, consider the following fact: The Belarusian army has 1,700 T-72 battle tanks. Poland, a new NATO member with the most powerful army in Central Europe and with four times the population of Belarus, has only 900 T-72s.

Despite strong denials from Lukashenko, Belarus has been a key partner of Saddam Hussein in his effort to rebuild and modernize Iraq's air defense capability. Belarus has violated international law by secretly supplying Baghdad with SA-3 antiaircraft missile components as well as technicians. Given that Iraq has repeatedly tried to shoot down U.S. and British aircraft patrolling the U.N. no-fly zone — with more than 420 attempts this year alone — covert Belarusian-Iraqi military cooperation is disturbing and should set off alarm bells in Western capitals.

.... It is only thanks to cheap energy subsidies from Russia that the Belarusian economy remains afloat. Since Russia is the only country that has the necessary economic and political influence on Belarus, it is imperative that Washington us e its new relationship with Moscow to encourage the Russians to exert their leverage on Belarus to cease covert arms sales to rogue states and terrorist groups."

The Embassy of Belarus in the United States issued the following statement concerning the article in the "Washington Post":

Authoritative periodical "Washington Post" issued recently an article with vague allegations that Belarus sells arms to terrorist groups and rogue states in contradiction to international agreements and United Nations resolutions.

In this regard Embassy of Belarus states that the Republic of Belarus strictly follows its obligations under international treaties and agreements covering sphere of arms sales. Fully compliant with them Belarus does not sell arms either to nations which are under ban of the United Nations Security Council resolutions or to any terrorist groups which now pose or may in the future introduce a threat to international peace and stability. On the contrary Belarusian policy in the sphere of export control is a subject for consultations with governments of the United States, Great Britain and other countries.

Just the reverse to allegations Belarus has actively participated in counter terrorism efforts both within its borders and in concert with international community. Belarus strongly condemned terrorist attacks of September 11 and presently duly fulfills obligations envisaged in the UN Security Council resolution 1373 on international cooperation to combat terrorism.

Editor's Note: The text of this statement has not been modified in any way.

NEWS BRIEFS

CHRONICLE of EVENTS

Oct. 18, 2001

RESIDENTS WANT MINSK BELTWAY TO DETOUR STALIN-ERA MASSACRE SITE

A rally of residents of Minsk's Zyalyony Luh-6 suburb on 17 October decided to seek a meeting with the state authorities over the reconstruction of the Minsk beltway, which threatens to damage the neighboring Kurapaty site where the Stalin-era NKVD executed tens of thousands of "enemies of the people" (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 1 October 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Some 500 people from the suburb signed a petition asking the authorities to build a four-kilometer beltway section bypassing Kurapaty. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 18, 2001)

Oct. 29, 2001

BELARUSIANS MARCH IN DEFENSE OF STALIN-ERA MEMORIAL SITE.

Some 1,500 people, mainly activists of the opposition Conservative Christian Party (KKhP), took part on 28 October in an authorized march from downtown Minsk to the Kurapaty wooded suburb where the Stalin-era NKVD conducted mass executions of "enemies of the people," Belapan reported. The recent reconstruction of the Minsk beltway is seen by many public and opposition activists in Minsk as a direct threat to the neighboring Kurapaty memorial. They propose that the authorities build a road bypassing Kurapaty. "If the authorities lack money to construct a road bypassing Kurapaty, we will collect people's donations and build the bypass," KKhP acting Chairman Yuras Belenki told the demonstrators. The KKhP is led from abroad by Zyanon Paznyak, who

was given political asylum in the United States in 1996. It was Paznyak who in 1988 broke the news about the existence of the Kurapaty massacre site to the Belarusian public. According to Paznyak, more than 200,000 victims of the NKVD are buried at Kurapaty. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 29, 2001)

Nov. 9, 2001

BELARUSIAN POLICE REMOVE PROTEST CAMP AT STALIN-ERA MEMORIAL SITE

Riot police on 8 November tore down a camp set up six weeks ago by Belarusian opposition groups and NGOs at Kurapaty, a wooded suburb of Minsk where tens of thousands of "enemies of the people" were executed and buried by the Stalin-era NKVD in the 1930s (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 6 November 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The camp was pitched to prevent the reconstruction of the Minsk beltway that threatens the existence of the Kurapaty memorial site. Police used truncheons and tear gas to remove the camp and protesters, while road construction workers smashed down crosses erected along the beltway by defenders of the memorial site. Several protesters were arrested. "The regime that destroys crosses are Satanists, not Christians. Today's events prove [President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka to be a direct heir of Stalin. If he was given a free hand, he would unleash mass murders in Belarus, another Kurapaty," opposition activist Vycheslau Siuchyk told Belapan. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 9, 2001

Dec. 4, 2001

OSCE ENVOY IN MINSK SUMS UP HIS MISSION

Hans Georg Wieck, the head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, told Belapan on 3 December that the "recent purges" by the Belarusian authorities among those nomenklatura representatives who cooperated with the opposition during the presidential election campaign are "alarming and inconsistent with pluralistic democratic criteria." Belarusian media have recently reported mass arrests among Belarusian managers and state officials on criminal charges (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 28 November 2001). Wieck said the major achievement of his group was to impart understanding of the necessity of changes to "the nomenklatura and key personalities," as well as to contribute to the development of civil society in Belarus. Wieck, who has headed the OSCE group in Minsk since February 1998, will soon leave Belarus. His successor is expected to be named during the session of the OSCE Ministerial Council that opened in Bucharest on 3 December. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 4, 2001))

POLITICS (Opposition)

OPPOSITION LEADER URGES CONTROL OF BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN BORDER — Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, has said Belarus should urgently reestablish all border controls and customs procedures along its border with Russia because of the ongoing antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, Belapan reported on 9 October. According to Vyachorka, Belarus should in this way take preventive measures against an expected inflow of refugees from Afghanistan as well as from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. "Now that Belarus actually does not control its border with Russia, we are risking to be swept by this wave [of refugees], which would inevitably bring problems of poverty, disease, drug addiction, crime, and terrorism to each Belarusian town," Vyachorka said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 10, 2001)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION DENIES MISUSING WESTERN AID — The Belarusian opposition group Charter-97 has rejected the accusations of misuse of Western aid that were made public by political analyst Alyaksandr Fyaduta last month, Belapan reported on 21 October. "All that Fyaduta said to Interfax about the usurpation of grants and financial schemes is a lie from the first word to the last," Charter-97 coordinator Dzmitry Bandarenka told journalists. Fyaduta alleged that the opposition misused $24 million. "Fyaduta made a big mistake citing this sum. U.S. charitable funds provided a total of $22 million in assistance under the interstate agreement. Of this amount, $12 million was given in humanitarian aid, including to Chernobyl-affected areas, $6 million was spent on exchange programs, $3 million on support of the independent press in Belarus, and $1 million or a little more on Belarusian NGOs and initiatives," Bandarenka said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 22, 2001)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PARTY PROPOSES DIALOGUE WITH LUKASHENKA — The United Civic Party (AHP) has addressed a proposal to the administration of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to begin talks on democratizing the public life and legitimizing the legislature through democratic elections, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 22 October. AHP leader Anatol Lyabedzka told RFE/RL that the talks could focus on the OSCE's four conditions for democratic elections in Belarus: enacting legislation to ensure a transparent electoral process; giving the opposition access to the government-controlled media; stopping political oppression; and expanding the legislature's powers. The AHP has also asked for airtime to present its dialogue proposal on Belarusian Television. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 23, 2001)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION UNWILLING TO ENTER 'SOCIOPOLITICAL DIALOGUE.' — The Consultative Council of eight Belarusian opposition parties on 31 October confirmed their readiness for political talks with the authorities, but not within the framework of a broad "sociopolitical dialogue" that was recently suggested by presidential aide Syarhey Posakhau (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 30 October 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. "I think the authorities are unable to conduct political talks about the power system or principles for the implementation of legislation. Therefore, they want to deal with some corporate structures and organizations of hobbyists; for example, with dog breeders and philatelists. It is easier to talk with them," Social Democratic Party leader Stanislau Shushkevich said. The opposition wants to discuss the four issues proposed by the OSCE in 2000: giving more powers to the legislature, stopping political persecution, providing the opposition with access to the state media, and bringing electoral legislation into line with international standards. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 1, 2001)

TRADE UNION LEADER ADVISES WEST NOT TO RUSH TO EMBRACE BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT — Uladzimir Hancharyk, the chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rival in the 9 September presidential ballot, has called on the international community not to rush into improving relations with the Belarusian regime, Belapan reported on 25 November. "If the isolation is removed and there is not any action in response on the part of Lukashenka, if there is not any dialogue with political parties and trade unions, then such a thaw will produce nothing and will only be used for strengthening the regime," Hancharyk said. An OSCE Parliamentary Assembly mission consisting of Uta Zapf of Germany and Urban Ahlin of Sweden is currently visiting Belarus to study the postelection situation there. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 26, 2001)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION RALLIES TO DEMAND TRUTH ABOUT DISAPPEARANCES — Some 500 opposition activists staged an unauthorized demonstration called "The Chain of Indifferent People" in Minsk on 9 December to demand from the authorities the truth about the disappearances of opponents to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime, including Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar, Belapan reported. Similar, albeit less numerous demonstrations, were held in Homel, Brest, and other Belarusian cities. Police ar-

rested 20 protesters in Brest and Baranavichy. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 10, 2001

BELARUS'S TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES HOLD CONGRESSES — The Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front and the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front held congresses in Minsk on 16 December, Belapan reported. The Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), once an influential opposition force, split into the BNF Conservative Christian Party and the BNF Party in 1999 over a leadership controversy. The congress of the BNF Conservative Christian Party re-elected Zyanon Paznyak, who has been in political exile since 1996, as the party's leader. In a written message to the congress, Paznyak said the party's main task is to seek a new presidential election in Belarus under what he called international protectorate. The BNF Party congress re-elected Vintsuk Vyachorka as the party's leader. Vyachorka said the party's main task is to defend the country's independence in connection with the Lukashenka regime's integration drive toward Russia and a possible election of a Russia-Belarus Union legislature. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 17, 2001)

POLITICS (Government)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT URGES BROADCASTING COMPANY TO ACHIEVE WORLD-CLASS LEVEL — "Information pressure from outside and the battle for the control of minds have not ended. There are no breaks in this confrontation, and in order to win tomorrow we have to reach a world level today," Lukashenka told the staff of the National Broadcasting Company on 13 October. He added that Belarus should have "a [qualitatively] new television" beginning on 1 January 2002. Lukashenka promised technical support to the company and a new manager, following the unexpected death of National Broadcasting Company Chairman Valery Skvartsou last month. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 15, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT EMPOWERS HIMSELF TO APPOINT ACADEMY OF SCIENCES HEAD... — Alyaksandr Lukashenka has decreed that the president of the National Academy of Sciences is to be appointed by the president of Belarus, Belapan reported on 18 October. The members of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences must also be approved by the president of the republic. Prior to the decree, the president of the National Academy of Sciences was elected by the general gathering of academicians and approved by the president of the state. "This decree testifies to the strengthening of the totalitarian character of our state," the Belarusian Helsinki Committee commented. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 19, 2001)

BELARUS' SUPREME COURT REJECTS APPEAL OVER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION — The Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee contesting the validity of the 9 September presidential elections, Belapan reported on 25 October. The committee cited a number of violations committed by the authorities during the election campaign in an effort to overturn the Central Election Commission's decision that the ballot was valid. The court dismissed the appeal, saying, "neither the Electoral Code nor other legislative acts envisage the right to a court appeal against decisions by the Central Electoral Commission regarding a refusal to recognize an election as invalid." (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 26, 2001))

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES SUGGEST ANOTHER 'SOCIOPOLITICAL DIALOGUE.' — Presidential adviser Syarhey Posakhau said on 29 October that a dialogue among Belarus's sociopolitical forces is not only possible, but also necessary, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Posakhau was apparently responding to a recent proposal by the Belarusian opposition to begin talks with international mediation on democratizing public life in the country (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 23 and 25 October 2001). Posakhau said the dialogue should involve "all social strata and political groups" in Belarus, adding that the authorities rule out the "financial or technical" participation of foreign organizations in it. Posakhau also stressed that the dialogue should proceed from Belarus's "existing realities," including the recognition of Lukashenka as a legitimate president. In 2000, the Belarusian authorities orchestrated a "sociopolitical dialogue" of some 100 organizations. The dialogue, in which the opposition refused to participate, has failed to produce any significant results. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 30, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PROSECUTORS NOT EMPOWERED TO CONTROL GOVERNMENT? — The Prosecutor-General's Office has rejected a complaint by the For the Salvation of the Kurapaty Memorial group about the reconstruction of the Minsk beltway in the area of Kurapaty, the burial ground of tens of thousands of victims of the Stalin-era NKVD, Belapan reported on 5 November. The group believes the government violated the law by deciding to conduct the reconstruction work at Kurapaty, which is on the state register of historical memorials. The Prosecutor-General's Office said it is not empowered "to supervise resolutions and other legislative acts of the government." (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 6, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WARNS AGAINST INTERFERENCE IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS...— Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 17 November that "some foreign governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as states, are planning to provide colossal support to the forces that have already started to destabilize the situation in the country after the [presidential] election," Belarusian Television reported. "We cannot allow anyone to meddle in our domestic affairs anymore. This refers to both the West and our domestic opposition," Lukashenka continued. He stressed that he does not intend to hold any talks with the opposition, adding that there is nothing to discuss. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 19, 2001)

PRESIDENT CANCELS DECREE ON PROPERTY CONFISCATION — President Lukashenka has annulled his decree of November 1999 which allowed the government to confiscate property without court authorization from individuals charged with inflicting damage on the state, Belapan reported on 16 November. Vasil Khrol, the chairman of the Chamber of Representatives' Commission for Housing Policy, Construction, Trade, and Privatization, hailed the move as "the start of true liberalization" in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 19, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PUSHES FOR CLOSER RUSSIA-BELARUS UNION...— Speaking to reporters after closed-door talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 26 December, Alyaksandr Lukashenka said, "The time has come to dot all the I's and decide whether we consistently implement the earlier agreements...or make serious changes and clearly say it," AP reported. Putin, who rejected Lukashenka's proposal to discuss the approval of the so-called Constitutional Act that would put the creation of a single state to a nationwide referendum in both countries, said, "Success of the Russian-Belarusian integration is in its stability and consistency.... It is important not to lose the tempo and not to try to jump over objective steps." Lukashenka acknowledged that Putin was correct to point to the remaining obstacles to the states' integration, but said: "For Belarus, the strategic course for the union with Russia remains unchanged. It would be political death for me if it were otherwise." The leaders met prior to a meeting on 27

December of the Russian-Belarus Union's Supreme State Council and Council of Ministers, after which Lukashenka returned to Minsk. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 28, 2001)

PREDICTIONS OF COMMON CURRENCY VARY — Following the meeting of the Russia-Belarus Union Council of Ministers, Union State Secretary Pavel Borodin said the two states may introduce a common currency as early as 2003, ITAR-TASS reported on 27 December. Previously signed agreements envisioned this step no earlier than 2005 and linked the measure to Belarus ending price controls, but Borodin said he is certain all necessary agreements will be made prior to 2003. Russian Economic Development and Trade Minister German Gref, said following the 26 December meeting between Putin and Lukashenka that the leaders discussed, among other topics, drawing up a plan for making the Russian ruble the common currency of the union starting in 2005. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 28, 2001)

BELARUS TO CHARGE PATIENTS FOR SOME MEDICAL SERVICES — Alyaksandr Tsybin, an official in the Belarusian Health Care Ministry, said on 4 January that the introduction of payments for certain health care services "will not shock the Belarusian people." Tsybin, in an interview with the newspaper "Zviazda," said the new system of paid medical care will be introduced over the next decade and will amount to "about 30 percent of the total financing" of health care in Belarus. He said the Belarusian government is working on a list of services that will be offered by the state only upon payment by the patient. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan. 4, 2002)

ECONOMY

POLL SAYS 85 PERCENT OF BELARUSIAN BUSINESSMEN GIVE BRIBES — The International Finance Corporation found in a poll conducted in July and August among 335 owners of small- and medium-sized businesses in Belarus that 85 percent of them have offered bribes to bureaucrats, Belapan reported on 15 October. Of those polled, 44 percent said they give bribes occasionally while 41 percent said they bribe bureaucrats on a regular basis. The results of the poll are in stark contrast to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's repeated claims that under his rule corruption in Belarus has been virtually eliminated. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 16, 2001)

BELARUS TO IMPORT 1 MILLION TONS OF GRAIN THIS YEAR... — First Deputy Agricultural Minister Alyaksandr Prakopau told journalists on 16 October that Belarus will have to import some 1 million tons grain for food and fodder this year, Belapan reported. He did not specify any potential suppliers. Responding to a suggestion of grain supplies from Kazakhstan, Prakopau said that "it is better to have no business with that country." Prakopau said this year's grain output in Belarus will not exceed 5.2 million tons -- 300,000 tons more than last year but 1.8 million tons short of the target set by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka for 2001. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 17, 2001)

BELARUS TO HARVEST POOR POTATO CROP — Prakopau also said Belarus will harvest less than 1 million tons of potatoes this year, compared to 3 million tons in 1990. He added that the average yield of 10.1 tons per hectare (24.9 tons per acre) makes it "hard to pick out sellable potatoes." He also made an even gloomier remark: "Our potato sector is facing what our sheep industry has already gone through and what our flax industry is going through right now. Our sheep breeding is dead. The flax industry is slowly dying." (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 17, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PREMIER PLEDGES 'SERIOUS' ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION — Premier Henadz Navitski told the Chamber of Representatives on 26 October that his cabinet has prepared a "serious" legislative package to liberalize economic relations in the country, Belapan reported. Navitski said the government will shorten the list of business activities subject to licensing, allow the registration of companies based at private residences, cancel reregistration procedures, and allow regional authorities to register businesses. Navitski noted that the government has decided to free companies from declaring the source of investments not exceeding $10,000. Navitski also promised to reduce the tax burden on the real economic sector. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 29, 2001)

LUKASHENKA READY TO SELL PETROCHEMICAL GIANTS TO RUSSIA — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 30 October promised his assistance in reorganizing the Palimir petrochemical plant in Navapolatsk, northern Belarus, Belapan reported. Lukashenka said the government plans to merge Palimir with the Navapolatsk-based Naftan oil refinery and transform them into a joint stock company. He added that he has already concluded a preliminary agreement to that effect with Russian businessmen who are ready to invest in Belarus's petrochemical industry. Lukashenka noted that if potential investors propose scenarios that could benefit Belarus, he will support the idea of privatizing Palimir and Naftan. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 31, 2001)

BELARUSIAN CHIEF BANKER ASSURES IMF OF LIBERALIZATION PROGRESS — National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich on 30 October said the government has recently taken some steps to liberalize Belarus's economy, Belarusian Television reported. He cited the adoption of an Investment Code as well as recent decisions on attracting investment and shortening the list of licensed business as examples of that liberalization. Prakapovich was speaking with the IMF's European II Department head, Marta de Castello-Branco, who is currently in Minsk to hold consultations with the government prior to making a decision on an IMF loan program for Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 31, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PREMIER ASSURES IMF OF ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION... — Premier Henadz Navitski met on 6 November with an IMF mission that is currently in Belarus to monitor the results of an economic program implemented by the government in April-September, Belapan reported. Navitski assured the mission that his government is working to further liberalize monetary controls, tighten tax policy, curb inflation, speed up price liberalization, get rid of cross-subsidies, step up privatization, adopt universally recognized principles for tariff control, and remove any obstacles to free trade in anticipation of entry to the World Trade Organization. The premier also underscored his cabinet's intention to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises.(RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 7, 2001)

...WHILE IMF OFFICIAL WARNS AGAINST 'ILLUSION OF GROWTH.' — Meanwhile, IMF European II Department Director John Odling-Smee said in Minsk the same day that the Belarusian government has implemented the six-month program only in part. According to Odling-Smee, it is too early to talk about the possibility of the IMF's support for Belarus. Odling-Smee noted that a major cause of the Belarusian government's failure to observe some parameters stipulated by the program is its decision to increase the average monthly pay to the equivalent of $100. "Such an increase in wages should only be based on a related increase in labor productivity. Otherwise, it is just an illusion of growth in living standards. But the labor productivity has not increased enough," he said.(RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 7, 2001)

BELARUS' AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN THE RED — Deputy Agriculture Minister Anatol Rubanik said on 14 November that the combined debts of Belarusian agricultural enterprises now total nearly 1.1 trillion Belarusian rubles ($720 million), Belapan reported. "It would be extremely difficult to overcome this situation without the government's assistance," Rubanik commented. Rubanik added that the number of collective farms operating at a loss continues to increase. While in 2000 there were 1,185 loss-making farms in Belarus, the government expects this figure to grow by the end of this year to some 1,400, or 57 percent of the total. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 15, 2001)

BELARUS TO OBTAIN $70 MILLION FROM RUSSIA, BUT ON CONDITIONS — The Russian government is planning to provide a total of $70 million in state loans to Belarus in 2001 and 2002, Belapan reported on 1 December. Minsk may receive up to $30 million in 2001 if the government sets customs duties on the export of crude oil and oil products on a level with the rates applied in Russia. Moscow also made its loans conditional on Belarus's switchover to a competitive procedure of state purchases and stopping credit support to loss-producing agricultural enterprises. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 3, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PREMIER UNVEILS ECONOMIC PLAN OF ACTION... — Premier Henadz Navitski on 4 December presented his cabinet's economic program of action to the Chamber of Representatives, Belapan reported. Navitski said the program is based on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's reelection platform and his ideas about setting the economy on a "liberal track." The premier promised gradual economic liberalization with due regard for Belarus's own and neighbors' experience, but stressed that there will be no "shock therapy." The program's priority targets include increasing average monthly pay to an equivalent of $250 by the end of 2005; raising old-age pensions to 48 percent of monthly pay; completing the transition to targeted social welfare; and expanding housing construction. "If we tackle the transition to a market economy in earnest...I do not rule out that this program may become obsolete in a year," Belarusian Television quoted Navitski as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 5, 2001)

...PROMISES TO FREE PRICES IN AGRICULTURE...— Navitski told legislators that the government intends to free prices for agricultural products by the spring 2002, Belapan reported. "As long as we have strict price regulation in the agricultural sector, almost all other efforts [there] make no sense," the prime minister said. "[The government] has at last found forms and methods that will allow it to carry out the real reform of the agro-industrial complex," Navitski noted, adding that the government intends to preserve large agricultural enterprises, but will diversify ownership relations in the agricultural sector by including private owners. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 5, 2001)

...ANNOUNCES RUSSIAN CREDITS... — Navitski said Belarus will soon receive considerable credit support from Russia. He announced that during a Belarusian top-level delegation's visit to Moscow last week, the heads of the two countries' central banks signed an accord whereby the Central Bank of Russia will lend Belarus's National Bank 1.5 billion Russian rubles ($50 million) by the end of this year "to support the stability of our currency." The Russian government also promised to provide $30 million in preferential loans to Belarus this year. Belarus is also to receive $40 million in the first half of 2002 under the same credit arrangement. In addition, Russian Prime Minister Kasyanov promised that Russia will purchase 1.5 billion Russian rubles worth of Belarusian agricultural equipment by the end of 2001. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 5, 2001)

BELARUSIAN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR OPERATES AT LOSS — Agricultural Minister Mikhail Rusy said during hearings at the Chamber of Representatives on 13 December that this year the government expects a 2.9 percent loss in the agricultural sector, Belapan reported. The sector's losses are expected to total 147 billion Belarusian rubles ($94 million). The profitability of agricultural production declined from 45 percent in 1991 to 12 percent in 1999, and 3 percent in 2000. "Cosmetic increases in state purchase prices [for agricultural products] by 5, 7, or 15 percent actually do not save and improve the situation," Belarusian Television quoted one lawmaker as saying after the hearings. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 14, 2001)

BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN BREAD WAR BREAKS OUT IN BORDER REGION — Mahileu Oblast authorities recently lowered prices for bread in three raions bordering on Russia: Krychau, Klimavichy, and Kastsyukovichy, RFE/RL Belarusian Service reported on 17 December. The move was intended to drive traders with less expensive bread from Russia's Bransk and Smolensk Oblasts out of the local market. Russian bread traders have since disappeared from Mahileu Oblast, but now the oblast authorities must deal with long bread lines. The point is that the decrease in prices for bread in the three border raions was achieved at the expense of increased prices for bread in other raions of the oblast, and now people in Krychau, Klimavichy, and Kastsyukovichy buy more loaves than they previously required, and are selling the excess bread to those living further from the border. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 18, 2001)

BELARUSIAN TRADING HOUSES LIQUIDATED — Belarus's state concern Belresursy has ordered the liquidation of 11 trading houses in Russia in connection with their bankruptcies, "Kommersant-Daily" reported on 18 December. The trading houses -- in particular, in Smolensk, St. Petersburg, Rostov, Yekaterinburg, and Kostroma -- went bankrupt because Belarusian goods have become noncompetitive in Russia. Following an order from Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Belresursy established 20 trading houses in Russia in 1997-98. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 18, 2001

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SETS PRIVATIZATION STRATEGY — President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 19 December briefed the government on guidelines for the upcoming privatization of some enterprises in Belarus's petrochemical industry, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka said investors will not be allowed to lay off employees in privatized companies or decrease their wages. "There will be a very complex mechanism for privatizing enterprises in Belarus. No privatization will take place without approval of working collectives and management of the enterprises as well as that of local authority bodies -- the heads of raion, city, and oblast executive committees," he said. Lukashenka added that the state will keep controlling interests in privatized companies "in the first stage of privatization." He also promised that domestic bidders will be able to purchase "some 5-7 percent" of shares in privatized companies at a lower price than foreign companies. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 20, 2001))

BELARUS GETS $30 MILLION FROM RUSSIA — The Belarusian Finance Ministry said on 4 January that it has received the second tranche of a $100 million credit line from Russia, Interfax reported. The credit was established as part of preparations for the creation of the Belarus-Russia Union. The money is being loaned to Belarus at the benchmark LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) rate plus 0.75 percent. A first portion of the loan, $30 million, was sent to Belarus in August and the final tranche of $40 million is to be sent to Minsk later this year. (RFE/RL Newsline, Jan.. 4, 2002))

HUMAN RIGHTS

BELARUSIAN YOUTH LEADER JAILED FOR PICKET — A Minsk district court on 16 October handed down a sentence of 10 days arrest to Youth Front leader Pavel Sevyarynets for organizing an unauthorized picket in front of the Minsk Automobile Factory on 2 October (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 3 October 2001), RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Sevyarynets and his colleagues were protesting the alleged sale of the factory to Russia's Siberian Aluminum industrial group. "How did you come to think it was a picket?" Sevyarynets asked a policeman testifying against him in court. "If it had not been a picket, the journalists with tape recorders and video cameras would not have come there," the policeman responded. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 17, 2001)

BELARUSIAN YOUTHS PUNISHED FOR ANTI-FASCIST DEMONSTRATION — A Minsk court on 2 November sentenced opposition Youth Front leader Pavel Sevyarynets to 10 days in jail for his recent attempt to pay tribute to Belarusian resistance fighters executed by the Nazis during World War II (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 29 October 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Sevyarynets' colleagues, who joined him in an unauthorized anti-Nazi action in Minsk, were punished with fines of up to $750 or arrest for three days. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 5, 2001)

DEFENDERS OF MINSK'S STALIN-ERA MEMORIAL SITE JAILED, FINED — Police and demonstrators clashed for a second day on 9 November at Kurapaty on the outskirts of Minsk, the site of mass executions during the Stalin era (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 9 November 2001), Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Police detained some 30 protesters who wanted to protect the site from being damaged by the ongoing reconstruction of the Minsk beltway. On 9 November, courts in Minsk started to hand down jail sentences and fines to detainees. Youth Front leader Pavel Sevyarynets was sentenced to 10 days in jail (his fourth imprisonment this year) and Khvedar Zhyvaleuski to seven days, while Uladzimir Yukho, Leanid Sadouski, and Viktar Kaveshnikau were fined. Others are to stand trial later. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 13, 2001)

MASS ARRESTS REPORTED IN BELARUS — Over the past two weeks, Belarusian prosecutors have brought 210 criminal cases to court and issued arrest warrants for 720 people, mostly state officials of various levels and managers of state-run enterprises, the Charter-97 website reported on 27 November. The website suggested that the recent wave of arrests reflects President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's deepening mental disorder. Earlier this year Belarusian psychiatrist Dzmitry Shchyhelski publicized his diagnosis that Lukashenka is suffering from a "moderately pronounced psychopathy with the prevalence of traits of a paranoid and distractive personality disorder" (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 15 January 2001). "The demand made by the head of state to eradicate corruption is entirely fair. That is why we accept his complaints that corruption still exists. At one time the president gave the KGB the task of preventing Belarus from turning into a place in which secret services could act freely," KGB spokesman Fyodar Kotau commented on the recent arrests to "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" last week. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 28, 2001)

COURT BANS BELARUSIAN UNION OF STUDENTS. — The Supreme Court on 3 December ordered the closure of the Union of Belarusian Students (ZBS) because of four warnings issued to the union by the Justice Ministry, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The Justice Ministry found that the ZBS disobeyed the law by altering the color of its registered emblem from red to black (the ZBS said they had no color printer at the time), distorting its registered name in English (the ZBS preferred to write "Belarusan" instead of "Belarusian"), ignoring letters from the ministry (the ZBS said the ministry used a wrong address), and preventing the ministry's officials from checking the ZBS's books (the ZBS said the officials came when nobody was around to show them the books). Under Belarusian regulations, two warnings are sufficient for an NGO to be closed down. "Lukashenka is persecuting students and rectors because most students voted against him in the presidential election," ZBS leader Krystyna Sidun said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 4, 2001)

FOUR WOMEN PUNISHED FOR PICKETING LUKASHENKA'S RESIDENCE — Two women have been jailed for 10 days and two others fined some $950 each for an attempt to picket the residence of Belarusian President Lukashenka on 19 December, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The four women came to Minsk from Babruysk (Mahileu Oblast) to let the president know about their grievances: they were fired from work after they protested what they say was the local authorities' unfair distribution of housing. The authorities promised to help the women after they staged a 10-day hunger strike on Babruysk's central square in August, but subsequently forgot about their promise. "Now it is ridiculous, but I believed Lukashenka, I hoped that he would meet us. Now I am convinced that it is impossible to reach him. Only bandits could treat people the way authorities treated us today," one woman told Belapan after the trial, which lasted for 20 minutes and was conducted without defense counsel. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 20, 2001)

BELARUSIAN YOUTH GROUP ACCUSES KGB OF DRIVING MEMBER TO SUICIDE — Seventeen members of the opposition youth group Zubr (Bison) picketed the headquarters of the Belarusian KGB in Minsk on 27 December, accusing the agency of being behind a Zubr member's suicide, Belapan reported. Andrei Zaitsev, 24, hung himself on 20 December, leaving a note to the effect that the KGB had tried to recruit him as an informer. Zaitsev was recently sentenced to three months in jail on a charge of raping a female minor, and the KGB allegedly offered him freedom in exchange for his cooperation. "Using threats and blackmail, [the KGB] tried to make the young man betray his friends," a Zubr press release said. According to Zubr, the charge against Zaitsev was in conflict with medical evidence. The activists demanded an official investigation, while the KGB denied sending an agent to recruit Zaitsev. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 28, 2001)

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

PRINTERS REFUSE TO PRINT BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT WEEKLY — Brestskaya Drukarnya, the only printing house in Brest, southwestern Belarus, has refused to print the private weekly "Brestskii kurer," Belapan reported on 5 November. The refusal resulted from a clause in the contract between the two that allows the printing house to refuse printing if the weekly violates the press law. In September, "Brestskii kurer" received an official warning for publishing an appeal by the regional election headquarters of opposition presidential candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk. The appeal was signed by leaders of several unregistered parties, which provided the pretext for issuing the warning. Brestskaya Drukarnya Director Pyotr Kalenikau said the printing of the weekly can be resumed only once written permission is given by the regional authorities. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 6, 2001)

BELARUSIAN COURT CLOSES OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER — The Supreme Economic Court on 13 November shut down the opposition Belarusian-language weekly "Pahonya" based in Hrodna, a regional center in northwestern Belarus, Belarusian media reported. The court liquidated the newspaper under Belarus's media law, which allows for a publication to be closed after receiving two warnings from the authorities within a year. "Pahonya" received its first warning in October 2000. The second came on 21 September 2001, in response to the publication of materials before the 9 September presidential election on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's alleged role in the disappearance of opposition politicians. At that time police seized the entire issue with the incriminating materials, while prosecutors sued "Pahonya" for defaming the president. "This is a shame for the Belarusian jurisprudence, for Belarus and Belarusians," Editor in Chief Mikola Markevich commented on the verdict closing "Pahonya." (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 14, 2001)

RALLY PROTESTS CLOSURE OF BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION WEEKLY — Some 100 people took part in Hrodna on 19 November in a protest rally against the closure of the local opposition weekly "Pahonya" (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 20 November 2001), Belapan reported. Police charged "Pahonya" Editor in Chief Mikola Markevich as well as journalists Pavel Mazheyka and Andrey Pisalnik with holding an unauthorized demonstration. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 20, 2001)

CHIEF EDITOR OF BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER SUED FOR LIBEL — Prosecutors have sued Iosif Syaredzich, the editor in chief of the Minsk-based opposition newspaper "Narodnaya volya," for libel, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 19 November. The lawsuit was instigated by Minsk Oblast Executive Committee Chairman Mikalay Damashkevich in connection with a statement published by "Narodnaya volya" before the 9 September presidential election. The statement, signed by democratic opposition candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk and several other opposition figures, alleged that on 5 September Damashkevich held a conference of raion-level executive officials and instructed them on how to falsify results of the voting. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 20, 2001)

BELARUSIAN JOURNALISTS WARN AGAINST RESTRICTIVE DRAFT MEDIA LAW — The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) said that the draft media law that will soon be debated by the National Assembly calls for serious curbs on the freedom of the press, Belapan reported on 30 November. BAJ lawyer Mikhail Pastukhou said the bill, if adopted in its current form, would ban any mentioning of the activities of unregistered political parties and nongovernmental organizations in the media, whereas the current law only bans publishing statements on behalf of such parties and organizations. The draft bill provides for a simplified court procedure for closing a newspaper. To ban a newspaper, a judge would only have to establish the lawfulness and validity of warnings issued to the newspaper by an authorized governmental agency. The draft bill also bans media outlets from receiving financial support or equipment from foreign organizations and individuals as well as from anonymous sources. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 3, 2001)

BELARUSIAN JUDGE FAILS TO TRY JOURNALIST BECAUSE OF LOST CASE FOLDER — The judge of a district court in Hrodna on 5 December canceled the case of Mikola Markevich, the editor in chief of the recently banned independent weekly "Pahonya" (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 14 and 20 November 2001), Belapan reported. Markevich was to stand trial for organizing an unauthorized picket in defense of his newspaper last month. After ransacking the courtroom for the missing case folder, the judge told the journalist to come a few hours later. However, the folder was lost for good. Markevich called the happening symbolic, adding that "there cannot be order in this country under this regime." (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 6, 2001)

BELARUS & the WORLD

BELARUS SEEN AS TOP SUPPLIER OF ARMS TO ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS — Belarus is the largest supplier of weapons to Islamic radicals, dpa reported on 30 October, quoting U.S. and Israeli intelligence sources. According to those sources, in the first half of 2001, Minsk inked over $500 million worth of arms-supply deals with Arab, Palestinian, and Albanian Muslim extremists. "Belarus is one of the most secretive countries in its weapons deals and probably one of the most irresponsible countries you can think of," the agency quoted Siemon Wezemen, an expert on arms proliferation, as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 31, 2001)

OSCE CONFIRMS NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT OF BELARUSIAN ELECTION — The observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has released its final report on the 9 September presidential election in Belarus, Belapan reported on 1 November. The mission confirmed its preliminary conclusion that the 2001 presidential election process in Belarus failed to meet Council of Europe standards and OSCE commitments for democratic elections formulated in the 1990 Copenhagen Document. According to the report, the election process in Belarus was flawed by: the regime's drive to block the opposition at all costs; arbitrary changes of the electoral environment made by executive authorities; a defective legislative framework of the election; a nontransparent early voting procedure; a campaign of intimidation directed against opposition activists, domestic observation organizations, opposition, and independent media; and a smear campaign against international observers. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 2, 2001)

RUSSIAN ELECTION OFFICIAL SAYS BELARUS' ELECTION FLAWED — Aleksandr Veshnyakov, the chairman of Russia's Central Election Commission, told strana.ru on 5 November that Belarus's presidential election in September was "far from being an example to Russia and other countries that have embarked on the path toward democracy." Veshnyakov said the election "in some measure" complied with international election standards. "However, we have some very serious advice for our Belarusian colleagues on how to make their future elections meet the election standards in full rather than in some measure," Veshnyakov added. In particular, Veshnyakov recommended that each cast ballot be demonstrated to all those present at the polling station and every observer be entitled to a copy of the official election results at his/her station in order to make parallel vote count possible. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 5, 2001)

U.S. SENATOR PROPOSES $30 MILLION TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY IN BELARUS — Republican Senator Jesse Helms introduced a bill to the U.S. Congress on 7 November called "Belarus Democracy Act of 2001," which is intended to impose sanctions on the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and provide support to democratic institutions and organizations in Belarus. "Because of Lukashenka, Belarus has emerged as a dark island of repression, censorship, and command economy in a region of consolidating democracies," Helms said, adding that Belarus "has become the Cuba of Europe." The bill proposes that the U.S. government deny assistance to the Lukashenka regime, freeze Belarusian assets in the U.S., prohibit trade with Belarusian government-run businesses, and deny Belarusian officials the right to travel to the United States. The bill also proposes the appropriation of $30 million to assist Belarusian

democratic institutions and organizations, including funding for radio broadcasting in and to Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 8, 2001)

BELARUS WANTS RETURN OF SPECIAL GUEST STATUS IN PACE — Foreign Minister Mikhail Khvastou has sent a letter to the leadership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) with an appeal to reinstate Belarus's special guest status in the organization, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 8 November. Minsk was denied that status in January 1997, following the rigged November 1996 referendum that gave President Lukashenka authoritarian powers. The PACE Political Committee is scheduled to meet in Vilnius on 19-20 November, ahead of a PACE session in January 2002, and to work our recommendations regarding the status of Belarus. The meeting in Vilnius will be attended by an official delegation of Belarus's National Assembly and representatives of the opposition. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 9, 2001)

BELARUSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SLAMS PROPOSED U.S. SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION...— Foreign Minister Mikhail Khvastou told Interfax on 9 November that "The Belarus Democracy Act of 2001" proposed by U.S. Senator Jesse Helms (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 8 November 2001) "has no prospects, as it is odious and would lead to the severance of diplomatic relations between the two countries." Helms's legislative initiative calls for U.S. political and economic sanctions on the regime of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and for $30 million in U.S. assistance to pro-democracy groups and independent media in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 13, 2001)

...WHILE OPPOSITION LEADERS HAIL IT — "The political significance of this step is great," Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka on 9 November commented to Belapan with regard to Helms's bill. "I think Belarusian civil society should accept any assistance with gratitude. The situation is such that Belarusian NGOs and independent media outlets may receive support only from abroad," Belarusian Social Democratic Party leader Mikalay Statkevich said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 13, 2001)

BELARUS DOES NOT YET QUALIFY FOR IMF MONEY — IMF official Marta Castello-Branco told a news conference in Minsk on 9 November that talks between the IMF and Belarus on IMF loans under a standby arrangement may start no earlier than in mid-2002, Belapan reported. Castello-Branco said the Belarusian government failed to carry out in full a six-month IMF-monitored program which was a necessary precondition for such talks. She added that Belarus is now required to implement successfully another six-month program. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 13, 2001)

PACE TO SEND MISSION TO BELARUS — At its meeting in Vilnius on 19-20 November, the Political Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) discussed the situation in Belarus and resolved to send a delegation there for talks with representatives of the government, the opposition, and NGOs, Belapan reported. Quoting Jonas Cekuolis, Lithuania's representative on the political committee, Belapan said Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer has recently sent a message to Minsk stating four conditions for the renewal of the council's dialogue with Belarus: giving more powers to the legislative branch, abolishing the death penalty, guaranteeing independence of the media, and establishing the post of an ombudsman. "A very good foundation has been laid for cooperation with Belarus, both the official authorities and the opposition," another Lithuanian lawmaker on the PACE Political Committee, Vaclovas Stankevicius, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, though he did not elaborate. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 21, 2001)

OSCE ENVOYS PLEDGE CONTINUATION OF DIALOGUE WITH BELARUS — OSCE Parliamentary Assembly representative Uta Zapf told journalists in Minsk on 27 November that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will continue dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, Belapan reported. She said that the 9 September presidential election in Belarus failed to meet international standards, but added that the OSCE and other European parliamentary organizations deem the policy of international isolation of Belarus to be counterproductive. She confirmed that the OSCE has not abandoned its four requirements for democratizing the political life in Belarus: expanding the powers of the legislature, democratizing the Electoral Code, creating a climate of trust in the country, and giving the opposition access to the state-controlled media. During a three-day visit in Minsk, Zapf of Germany and Urban Ahlin of Sweden met with Belarusian officials and opposition figures as well as European ambassadors accredited to Minsk. Foreign Minister Mikhail Khvastou refused to receive the OSCE envoys, objecting to the presence of OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group head Hans Georg Wieck at such a meeting. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 27, 2001)

MISSING OPPOSITION LEADER'S WIFE URGES PUTIN 'TO STOP POLITICAL CRIMES' IN BELARUS — The wife of Belarusian opposition leader Viktar Hanchar, who disappeared in Minsk in 1999, has sent an open letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, urging him to "to stop political crimes" in Belarus, Belapan reported on 29 November. "You showed sympathy for a tragedy far away in New York. At the same time, you find it possible not to notice what is happening in your neighboring 'sister Belarus.' Prominent politicians disappear without trace in this small country in the center of Europe," Zinaida Hanchar said in her letter. "The disappearances of political opponents and the cynicism displayed by the Belarusian authorities over these crimes worry people not only in Belarus and Russia, but also far beyond our borders. I understand that Russia has strategic interests of its own in Belarus. But can friendship be built on the blood and suffering of people?" she asked. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 30, 2001)

BELARUS" PREMIER SAYS RUSSIA NOT READY FOR UNIFICATION WITH BELARUS — Navitski divulged to the Chamber of Representatives that Russia is not ready to reunite with Belarus as closely as the 1999 Union State Treaty stipulates. According to Navitski, Russian President Vladimir Putin even made an offer to President Lukashenka for both sides to make "certain departures" from the treaty. Navitski also disclosed that during their meeting last week, Kasyanov told him that Belarus should first bring its customs, banking, monetary, and budget laws into line with relevant Russian laws as a necessary condition for the further development of the Russia-Belarus Union. The Belarusian premier said a number of Belarusian laws will soon be scrutinized in order to draw up a list of amendments that Russia considers essential in creating equal conditions for Belarusian and Russian companies in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 5, 2001)

FOREIGN MINISTER DECLARES BELARUS ON TRACK INTO EUROPE...— Belarusian Foreign Minister Mikhail Khvastou told journalists on 11 December that Belarus in 2001 has entered the path of "normalizing its relations with the OSCE and the Council of Europe," adding that "the foundation for that [process] has been actually laid by the presidential election and the assessment of this election by observers primarily from the CIS as well as by those from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights." The OSCE observers concluded that the 9 September presidential ballot in Belarus failed to meet democratic election

standards, but advised against further international isolation of Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 12, 2001)

...EXPRESSES UNHAPPINESS WITH OSCE GROUP MANDATE... — Khvastou divulged that Minsk is not satisfied with the mandate of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus. "The way this mandate has been and is being interpreted by the group's current head [Hans Georg Wieck] does not suit us. The OSCE working group should deal with assessment of the situation and should not be a political part of our society," Khvastou said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 12, 2001)

...SAYS NO NEED TO SPEED UP INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA — Khvastou also said that during their meeting in Moscow earlier this month, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin "decided not to speed up processes of a purely political character" in the development of the Belarus-Russia Union. "Now a Constitutional Act [of the Belarus-Russia Union] is being worked out, and I think that this work will be done competently [but] without haste," Khvastou noted. And he added: "As regards an election to a union parliament, I think there is also no need for us to hurry." (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 12, 2001

MINSK TOUGH ON KYIV'S SOVIET-ERA DEBT — Ukrainian Premier Anatoliy Kinakh and his Belarusian counterpart Henadz Navitski met in Chernihiv, northern Ukraine, on 18 December to discuss trade and economic issues, Belarusian and Ukrainian media reported. The two premiers endorsed a plan of bilateral economic cooperation for 2002 calling for a rise in annual trade turnover to $1 billion from the current level of some $700 million. However, the sides did not address the contentious issue of Ukraine's Soviet-era debt to Belarus because an intergovernmental commission has failed to produce a relevant joint resolution. Navitski told Belapan that Minsk will not ratify the border agreement with Ukraine as long as Kyiv fails to repay its Soviet-era debt to Belarus. In 1997, Belarusian President Lukashenka said that debt amounted to $217 million. In a recent intergovernmental agreement, the figure shrank to $113 million, and Ukraine offered some property in Crimea to cover some of the debt. Navitski told Belapan that Ukraine is seeking to get rid of the clause for turning over the property, and wants the debt figure to be reduced to $51 million. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 19, 2001)

DEPARTING BELARUS OSCE HEAD NOTES IMPROVEMENT, LISTS REMAINING PROBLEMS — Hans Georg Wieck, whose four years as head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus comes to an end on 31 December, told AP on 21 December that he sees some changes for the better in the human rights situation in Belarus. "Society recognizes the necessity of forming a democratic alternative," he said. "Independent [electoral] observers at the lower level have formed a network, and a consultative council of opposition parties has been created that can act as a single political front." But Wieck then went on to list the many improvements remaining to be made: "Meaningful functions of parliament, avoiding the monopoly of state TV, radio, and other media. Respect of individual human rights, nondiscrimination toward political opponents. And, of course, a market economy." (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 28, 2001)

LETTERS

Ambassador Wieck's Post-Election Reflections

Dear Mr. Price,

A few weeks ago I received the latest edition of the *Belarusian Review*, which I read with great care and interest.

The article "Whither the Belarusian Democratic Opposition" published by the Monitor, September 14, 2001, deals with the post-election situation in Belarus and provides some insight into the election process. In this connection I would like to draw your attention to a number of developments:

1. The elections brought to the foreground a rather cohesive political and social alliance. This alliance will continue and thus provide over time a trustworthy alternative to the "Party in Power under Lukashenko." The president conceded defeat among the youth. The opposition including the countrywide independent observation network recruited more than 15,000 campaigners and observers, mostly young people. So the direction of development of democratic forces is the correct and a promising one, but the avenue to success is full of obstacles, which have to be mastered. International support will be necessary for the structures of the Council of Democratic Parties that evolved on the basis of the existing Advisory Council of Opposition Political Parties and their programs (among others, public hearings on issues of the nation and establishment of youth and women alliances) and will — in my judgment — be available.

2. Contrary to your assumptions, the largest number of campaign workers and election observers was not recruited from the BNF structures but from the social democratic and trade union camps. The boycott policies of recent years led to a lack of experience in election participation, notably among the groups of parties that supported the boycott.

3. Parties and social movements have gained some experience and more confidence and support among the population. Also, understanding has grown for coalition building, for the need to be able providing substantive guidance on policy issues and to bring up people capable to run government in the future. Preparation for all these tasks takes time, and new elections are coming up

November 3, 2001

Hans-Georg Wieck, Ambassador
Head of OSCE Advisory
and Monitoring Group in Belarus
Minsk, Belarus